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BY HAWLEY SMART



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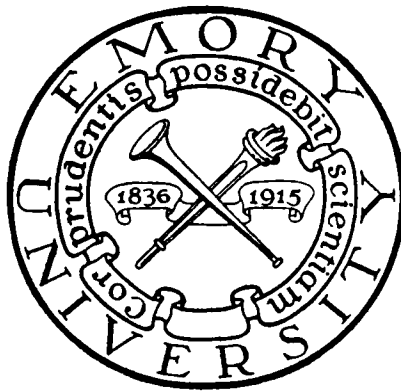
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BEATRICE AND BENEDICK

A Romance of the Crimea.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

“BREEZIE LANGTON,” “AT FAULT,” “TIE AND TRICK,”

“LONG ODDS,” “WITHOUT LOVE OR LICENCE,”

“THE PLUNGER,” &c., &c.

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TO
HENRY IRVING,

In remembrance of many pleasant nights at the Lyceum, during which the idea of this story first suggested itself, this book is dedicated by his sincere friend and admirer,

HAWLEY SMART.

BEATRICE AND BENEDICK.

A Romance of the Crimea.

CHAPTER I.

THE WALKING MATCH.

A BRIGHT sun and a nor'-easter, such as usually characterizes the merry month of May. A white, straight, dusty road, along which a man with his loins girt up and stripped to his shirt and trousers, is walking rapidly and doggedly. He is followed by a little knot of people apparently interested in his proceedings, one of whom, walking by his side, continually consults his watch ; indeed, the whole party seem extremely anxious as regards the time. The man, stripped of his coat, looks worn, travel-stained, and bears signs of weariness. If he is walking fast, there can also be little doubt from the set defiant expression in his face that he is walking "in difficulties." From time to time he throws a mute glance at his companion, who usually responds with much the same formula :

"Never fear, old boy—you'll do it all right ; all you have got to do is to keep on walking and think of nothing else. I'm doing *the thinking* for

you. You have got a mile to do every fourteen minutes, and you will just win clever!"

When Hugh Fleming three evenings ago backed himself to walk fifty miles in twelve hours, without training, the whole mess-table laughed. The brother officer who had laid two to one against his doing it, good-naturedly offered to scratch the bet any time during the evening. It seemed perfectly absurd that Fleming should perform any such feat as this. A man who had shown so far not the slightest taste for athletics—who rarely played cricket, never played racquets, and, with the exception of an occasional country walk, for the most part took his exercise round a billiard-table. He had never been known to walk a match, and when this one was made, said that he had never done such a thing before. His comrades all laughed at him, and, with that candour which close intimacy confers, bade him, "Not make a fool of himself, but cry off his bet before it was too late."

There was one exception to the popular feeling—there invariably is—and this was Tom Byng, Fleming's most intimate friend. Byng maintained a rigid silence as to what he thought of the affair, and even when appealed to declined to express any opinion thereon. He was a man who was rather an authority amongst his fellows on all matters of sport, whether with rod or with gun, whether on the race-course or on the cinder-track, and his brother officers were not a little anxious to

ascertain what he might think of this foolish wager. But no, neither at the dinner-table nor in the ante-room afterwards could he be induced to express his views. Until Fleming had retired for the night he smoked silently, and in answer to all inquiries as to what he thought of the match, merely shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I don't know; I never saw him walk in earnest." But no sooner had Fleming retired than, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire, he turned round to the layer of odds and said :

"If you would like to have a little more money against Fleming, Brydon, you can lay me £100 to £50."

"You may put it down," replied the other, "if you will tell me what you are going on."

"Willingly, Unless he is very vain, it is always very dangerous to bet against a man who backs himself, besides, when we were quartered at Portsmouth I once saw Fleming, for a joke, do a thing which, though I believe no great feat, would puzzle any man in this room to perform."

"You recollect at one end of the cricket ground there was a skittle alley, and after play, or when their side was in, men would sometimes have a turn at that fine old English game. Precious duffers at it too they were for the most part. Fleming was in there one day, chaffing a couple of men who were playing. When they had finished, he put up the pins again and said, 'Now if you

fellows can play let's see you take those down, one pin at a time, that is the nine pins in nine shots. You mustn't upset two at a time remember, or you will not have done what I mean.'

"‘Bah,’ said one of the men, ‘do it, of course I can't, nor you either, I will lay you ten to one you can't do it.'

"‘I think I can,’ replied Fleming quietly, ‘although it isn't easy. You *shall* lay me ten to one in shillings,’ and to our astonishment Fleming proceeded to accomplish the feat.

"I didn't know he could play skittles, and most certainly don't know that he can walk, but he *might*, I'm backing him on the off."

Such were the events which had led up to the match now taking place. Fleming had started at seven in the morning, accompanied only by two brother officers, one of whom was acting as umpire.

When he had accomplished his first twelve miles in two hours and a half and then stopped to breakfast these gentlemen thought that he would win his wager easily. But the pace was too good to last, and when Byng arrived just as Fleming was finishing his thirtieth mile, the match had begun to look very black for the pedestrian. He was untrained, he had no experience of walking matches, and he had nobody to coach him. Whatever the man's capabilities might be he did not know how to make the most of them. As he had not

understood the husbanding of his own powers in the early part of his undertaking, so now he did not know how to use what was left of them. He was losing time on every mile ; there were twenty more weary miles to tramp, and each of them took him longer to accomplish than those that had gone before. All the fiery dash of the morning was gone and the afternoon saw the sorely distressed man still struggling gamely with the task which it was rapidly becoming an obvious impossibility that he should perform. Had Byng not arrived at this critical juncture it had been little use his arriving at all : but the minute he understood the state of things he made a rapid calculation in his head, examined Fleming critically as he walked alongside of him, and then said :

“ I tell you what, old boy ; if you’re game and will do as I tell you, you will just pull through ; but there won’t be much to spare.”

“ I’m about cooked,” replied Fleming, “ but I’m quite good to go on till you say it’s hopeless.”

“ It’s a good way off hopeless at present,” replied the other, for the first time giving the advice which he is reiterating at the beginning of this chapter.

As they turned at the milestone (for under Byng’s guidance, the mile being tolerably level, the match was to be completed over that mile walking it backwards and forwards) there was a slight commotion among some of Fleming’s

partisans, who had now assembled to watch the conclusion of his task. What it was, was hardly discernible at the distance they then were from it, but as they came nearer it was evident that in their zeal for his success some of Fleming's partisans had stopped a smart carriage full of ladies, for fear it should prove a hindrance to their champion. The fair tenants had willingly acquiesced upon understanding what they had to pull up for. Two young ladies stood up as Fleming went by and scanned him narrowly.

"Who did you say it was, Pritchard?" enquired a tall showy girl, of the coachman.

"It's one of the officers, miss," replied the man touching his hat; "but I didn't catch his name. He's backed himself to walk a lot of miles in a certain time."

"They are a new lot, Nell," said the speaker; "they only came in about six or seven weeks ago. Papa has but just called, and I haven't met any of them yet. Besides, you know, in common decency for those who have gone; the —th were a very nice lot of fellows, and very popular; we really must, so to speak, wear mourning for them a little."

"More than they will do for you, my dear," replied her companion, laughing. "Soldiers and sailors are marvellous hands at quick transfer of the affections."

"Ah, well, I don't suppose there's much harm done on either side. Singed wings here and there

no doubt, but for most of us only many a pleasant dancing party to look back upon, and genuine regret that our pet partners will meet us no more. This looks promising for the new comers. As long as a regiment has some go in them, there's always hope for us. A very pretty taste in balls and picnics I have noticed often accompanies sporting tendencies, but when we get a regiment that does nothing, as now and again we do—Ugh!" and Miss Smerdon shrugged her pretty shoulders, as much as to say no words could express her feelings for the British soldier who socially failed to do his duty.

A tall, good-looking girl, with a profusion of wavy brown hair, Miss Smerdon was considered a beauty in her own part of the country. She was the only daughter of a wealthy iron-master, and in spite of her having two brothers, she was likely, if not an heiress, yet to bring her husband a very substantial dowry. She was a popular girl, and no one could say that Frances Smerdon was deficient in "go." Elderly ladies sometimes shook their heads over her doings, and whispered "bold and fast" behind their fans; but for all that there was no real harm in her. She rejoiced in high spirits, and was perhaps a little too given to defy conventionalities, but her escapades when looked into were of a very venial nature, and more prompted by her love of fun than anything else. She enjoyed life keenly as well she might with both youth and wealth at her call, and threw herself into whatever she was doing

with all her heart. How she and Nellie Lynden had become such intimate friends was rather a puzzle to their acquaintance. The latter lived in Manchester, but was in the habit of paying long visits to Monmouthshire, where, some half-dozen miles from Newport, Mr. Smerdon had a handsome country seat.

"No! don't let him drive on, Frances, we are in no hurry, and I want to see that officer come back again. I don't know what he's trying to do, but I am interested in it. I feel sure he will do it whatever it is."

"Stay where you are, Pritchard," replied the other, laughing. "We wish to see a little more of this match."

"Well," she continued, turning to her friend, "Love at first sight we've heard of, but faith at first sight such as yours I have never yet met with. Why such belief in this unknown pedestrian?"

"It's a striking face," rejoined Nell Lynden, "I don't mean a particularly handsome one, but a more resolute bull-dog one I never saw. He was in distress when he passed us, but that man will do the task he has set himself, or drop by the wayside."

And now once more Fleming and his three or four attendants pass close to their carriage. He keeps side by side with his mentor, and there is a set dogged look on his face, which, pale though it

is, shows no sign of flinching. He is evidently very nearly done, but there can be little doubt that he will go on to the bitter end, and it is evident to all the lookers-on that Byng has determined he shall. To do the latter justice it is not his own stake on it that he is thinking of, but his blood is up, he has identified himself with his protégé and he is resolved he shall win. He has made up his mind to take the last ounce out of his man just as he would out of his horse in riding a punishing finish. He has spared himself not a whit since he came upon the scene, and has walked sixteen miles by his friend's side; only four more miles to go, and if his protégé can but keep at the pace he's going, the match will be won with five or six minutes to spare. The excitement waxes intense as the finish draws near. Win or lose—it *is* a match, and must be a very close thing. It takes all Byng can do to keep his man up to the requisite pace, and there can be no doubt that, left to himself, Fleming would have imperceptibly slackened in that matter. It is very hard for a beaten man to keep both his eye on the watch and regulate his speed at the same time. The sympathies of the regiment and even of the lookers-on, who had come out of the neighbouring town to see the finish of such a sporting affair, are all with Fleming. The public always wish success to the man who backs himself in anything of this sort. It requires pluck to perform such an arduous task, and that is a thing

which always enlists the sympathies of Englishmen. Even Brydon could not resist the excitement.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, as the last mile but one was begun, "I think he'll win. It will cost me a couple of hundred if he does, but I can't help hoping he will. We don't know much of each other till a pinch comes that's certain. Who'd have thought that Hugh Fleming had such stuff in him?"

But this mile Byng had no little trouble to get his protégé along. Now and again Fleming stumbled in his walk. The truth is he was suffering from one of the most severe trials to which a man is exposed in a long walk of this nature. His feet were giving way, which means that before long the walk must be reduced to a hobble, and to crawl a mile within half-an-hour will be about all that he can accomplish. He had lost two minutes in spite of Byng's exertions over the last, and there remained to him but eighteen minutes in which to walk the concluding mile.

The young ladies had lingered to see the finish of the match, and as Fleming passed their carriage for the last time, with still half-a-mile to get, Nell Lynden turned to her friend and said :

"Now let's go home, Frances. He'll do it ; but I wish we hadn't stopped to watch him go by this time. Poor fellow, he is suffering terribly. I could see his lips twitch as he passed us."

They well might, for to say nothing of being

dead beat, Hugh Fleming was experiencing the sensations of a cat on hot bricks, every time he put his feet to the ground. Pritchard turned his horses round, and in accordance with Miss Smerdon's instructions drove leisurely homewards.

But ere they had gone far the sounds of a ringing cheer fell faintly on their ears, and told them that Hugh Fleming had won his match. It had been a close shave, but the fifty miles had been completed with two good minutes to spare.

"A fine thing, and a pretty match," said Byng, "but I tell you what, Brydon, if he'd only had a week in which to harden his feet, he'd have won with half-an-hour in hand. If you want your revenge, I'll back him to walk——"

"No you don't," cried the hero of the hour, as his partisans picked him up and carried him to the carriage which was in waiting. "This child has had enough walking to last him his natural life. And he's beginning to think that cavalry is the branch of the service which would suit him best."

CHAPTER II.

WAR MUTTERINGS.

NELL LYNDEN'S father and Mr. Smerdon had been friends in their school-boy days, at which period the position of Lynden's family was certainly superior to that of the latter's. But both boys had their way to make in the world; neither had any pros-

pect of succeeding to any fortune from their parents. Robert Lynden went up to London and was speedily lost in the whirlpool of the great city. What became of him, what he did there, nobody knew. For the first year or two that he was in London, they heard from him regularly at home. He had apprenticed himself to a chemist, and entertained serious thoughts of turning to medicine as a profession later on, and to enable him to attend the schools his father volunteered considerable pecuniary assistance. For a few months young Lynden drew on him steadily for this purpose, then suddenly all communication from him ceased. He not only abstained from writing for money, an exigency apt to ensure punctual correspondence, but he did not write at all. His mother grew very anxious about him, enquiries were set on foot, the chemist to whom he had bound himself was duly communicated with, and replied that Robert Lynden, after voluntarily apprenticing himself, had broken his indentures at the end of a year, and that he had neither seen nor heard anything of him since. His father went up to town and made enquiries in every direction. He even consulted the police on the subject ; but no, nothing could be heard of the missing youth, London seemed to have swallowed him up, and all endeavours to ascertain his fate proved useless. He was advertised for in all directions, for his people were well enough to do to be able to spend some little money in trying to trace

their boy. But nothing came of enquiry or advertisement, and after a time his mother mourned for him as dead, while his father came sadly to the conclusion that his disappearance was one of those inscrutable mysteries ever characteristic of great cities. Whether he had been foully done to death who could say? or whether he was the unrecognised victim of some accident. But that their son was dead, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lynden entertained the slightest doubt, and in due course of years went to their graves undisturbed in that belief.

Nellie Lyndon could have told you very little about her father's antecedents. She could barely remember her mother, who had died when she was very young, and from that time her life had simply been a progress from one school to another. Clever, sensitive, even as a child the thought had oppressed her that she belonged to nobody. She was kindly treated, but it was bitter for her when the holidays came and the other girls went to their homes. There were no holidays for her, for what were holidays without a home? and she had no home. Boys we know can be very cruel to each other, and I fancy girls are very little better in this respect. Some of her schoolmates, perhaps because they were out of temper, perhaps from that innate desire to torture which exists in the young of both sexes, would twit Nellie when the holidays came round with having nowhere to go to. They would enquire with affected interest, if she did not find it dull

being there all those weeks by herself. And she did find it dull—horribly dull, and they knew it.

Her schoolmistresses were kind enough, but what could they do? Their engagement with her father was that they should always take care of her in the holidays, as he had no home to take her to. He was kind enough to the desolate girl upon his few brief visits, and lavish with regard to money for her dress or anything else she fancied as she grew older. But, except occasionally for a very few days he had never taken her away with him. And then an hotel had been her home. The result of this peculiar training had been to make Nellie Lynden a somewhat reserved girl, not one to give away her friendship lightly, and though popular in every school she had ever been in, she had never formed one of those gushing friendships which girls are so apt to contract in these days.

Some four years before our story commences she had been called upon to come home and take charge of her father's house. For the first time in his life Dr. Lynden admitted of having a house. Nellie further wondered on the receipt of this letter, whether he had also a practice. Questioned once upon this point, he had replied that he had practised chiefly abroad, that he had given it up now, and only prescribed in an amateurish way for a few intimate friends and acquaintances. He had further made some rather severe strictures on the vice of curiosity, and avowed his opinion that there was no

such bore alive as a painfully inquisitive person. This was quite sufficient hint for Nellie. She never ventured to enquire further into the past life of her father. She accepted things as they were, and admitted that she had no cause to complain. The doctor's house in the suburbs of Manchester, though not large, was extremely comfortable. Nellie was perfectly satisfied with the rooms placed apart for her exclusive use, as well as the drawing-room and dining-room. The doctor reserved for himself besides his bed-room, a large room fitted up as a laboratory, which he called his "den." The peculiarity about this room was that it was guarded by elaborate double doors from the rest of the house, and further, had a separate stair communicating with the outside, so that it was possible for the doctor from his laboratory to leave the house without the knowledge of the other inmates. The outer of these doors was kept jealously locked, which the doctor explained by saying that evil smells were emitted from apartments of that description, and that he did not wish the rest of the house poisoned ; moreover that servants could never resist touching things, and that he did not wish a housemaid to blow her head off by fiddling with a retort which did not concern her. He had had a passion for chemistry from his youth up, but it was really only of late that he had found leisure to indulge it.

" I can't say as yet, Nell, that I've made any discovery calculated to benefit mankind. I don't

suppose I ever shall, but it amuses me, and hurts nobody. I've done my best to render my hobby inoffensive, so you must put up with it."

"My dear father," said Miss Lynden, "why shouldn't you do as you like in your own house? As for the laboratory, the double doors are so effective that I am sure no one could ever detect that there was such a thing in the place."

If Dr. Lynden went out but little himself he was not forgetful of his daughter. He made arrangements with a lady, with whose husband he was tolerably intimate, to act as Nell's chaperon, and as that young lady herself was by no means unattractive, she was not long before she knew a good many people in Manchester. Her chaperon, Mrs. Montague, was one of those vivacious ladies who contemplate passing an evening at home with dismay. This restless lady could not bear the idea of not assisting at everything that was going on in Manchester, and would work with untiring patience and assiduity to obtain tickets. The more difficult they were to come by, I verily believe the more she enjoyed it, and she was perfectly callous to all social rebuff in matters of this nature.

Some two years ago, Nellie, while under the wing of Mrs. Montague, chanced to meet Frances Smerdon at a dinner-party, and the iron-master's daughter at once conceived a strong liking for the quiet, reticent, lady-like girl. Miss Smerdon, who had come on a month's visit to Manchester, con-

trived to see a good deal of her new friend in the course of her visit. In the first instance the liking had been entirely on the part of Frances, but gradually Nellie thawed under the advances of her more impressionable friend, and before Miss Smerdon left, it had been arranged that Nellie should pay her a visit in Monmouthshire. Dr. Lynden, as soon as he knew who she was, took the greatest possible interest in Miss Smerdon. He enquired after her father, whom he recollected as the employé of a great iron company in South Wales, and seemed much struck at discovering that he had blossomed into a large iron-master on his own account. Although reticent about his own past as ever, he told Frances that he and her father had been school-fellows, and this seemed an additional link in the friendship of the two girls. It had subsisted now about two years, and Frances was enthusiastic in Miss Lynden's praises.

Knowing her father's strong opinions on the sin of curiosity, Nellie was rather amused to see how extremely interested he was in all particulars concerning the life of his old chum, Matthew Smerdon. He never wearied of asking Smerdon's daughter about him on such occasions as Frances was in Manchester, and cross-examined Nellie on her return from Monmouthshire in a manner diametrically opposed to his expressed opinions. Smerdon too, in his turn, had been curious to hear of his old school-boy friend, and the two girls sometimes dis-

cussed their respective fathers, but there was this difference, whereas Matthew Smerdon's career was not only well-known to his daughter but to all his neighbours, from the very outset, nobody knew anything about Dr. Lynden's, from his disappearance almost as a boy in the great London wilderness, until his reappearance as a retired medical man in Manchester some four years ago. That he had practised on the Continent, and made money, was the brief account that Dr. Lynden deigned to give of his past.

* * * * *

At this particular juncture there commenced a bickering between England and the great Autocrat of the North, which, little as anyone dreamed of it at the time, was shortly destined to set all Europe by the ears. Europe had been at peace ever since Waterloo, and that big battles were ever again to be fought amongst the western nations was apparently looked upon by politicians with incredulity. Still that real or mythical will of Peter the Great had always been kept steadily in sight by the rulers of Russia. To come to Constantinople sooner or later ever their fixed resolution, and the Turks still believe just as firmly that they will, and that it is their *Kismet*. But as to about the when they are to arrive there the Russians have fallen into great mistakes. If the Turk submits resignedly to his *Kismet* in the end, yet he will fight bitterly to avert it, as he has shown at Plevna

and elsewhere. Moreover the nations of Europe have ever regarded with jealous eyes the idea of Russia at Constantinople. The Czar, Nicholas, was doubtless aware of all this when he made up his mind that the pear was ripe for the plucking. Europe might not like it, but who was there to interfere with him? There was no united Germany in those days. France had only recovered from its state of chronic revolution to have a relapse in the shape of a *coup-d'état*, while for England one might as well expect to see a Quaker in the prize ring as Great Britain intervening by arms in any of the quarrels of Europe.

The nations of the West might not like it; but then in the words of the immortal Wegg, "The nations of the West were at liberty to lump it." Very busy was the English Government with notes, and protests, circulars, etc., finally dabbling with that most dangerous of all documents, an ultimatum. That England would ever fight about such a trifle as Russia annexing the Danubian provinces of Turkey was a thing neither believed in by the Czar nor the British Government. But the temper of the English people had to be reckoned with. The English people may be thick-headed, but they are also extremely obstinate, and close on forty years ago John Bull made up his mind that he would stand no Russian aggression and that it was his bounden duty to protect the Turks. After Waterloo, the Millennium; forty

years, and there comes another big war; forty years again, and those gallant Turks for whom it was waged are pronounced "unspeakable." And I fancy there are a good many big battles yet to be fought before we come to the final field of Armageddon.

The English nation had taken the bit between its teeth, and was "neither to haud nor to bind." It was bent upon fighting, and no Government could control it—kicked the Government of the day indeed out of the saddle in a very short time. Whether we were ready for war, or indeed whether any nation in Europe was what would be termed ready for war in these days, is open to question. Before we knew where we were, we were committed to it, and had to make the best of it. That this should occasion much confusion at the Horse Guards, as it was then, and much ordering and counter-ordering of troops, was only natural. One thing which still further complicated affairs was the persistency with which the Government clung to the belief that the whole thing would end after all in "a demonstration," that the strengthening of our garrisons in the Mediterranean and the landing of a small army at Gallipoli must convince the Czar that we were in earnest. It was not likely that the proud ruler of the hordes of Turkestan and the Steppes of Tartary would flinch from lifting the gauntlet we had thrown down, and of this our rulers were very shortly destined to be convinced.

Now all this led, of course, to much shifting and changing of troops, the places of regiments that had been promptly shipped off to the East had to be filled by others, brought from wherever the authorities could lay hands on them. Our military chiefs were painfully cognisant that they could do with many more regiments than we actually possessed, and that the British Army was terribly small in comparison to all that was required of it. Regiments got shuffled about in rather higgledy-piggledy fashion in those days. One thing safe to keep clearly in mind, that wherever a regiment might be sent it was as well it should be handy to a port of embarkation, for it was patent to anyone that if there was really going to be war every soldier that could be laid hands on in the United Kingdom would be required on the scene of action. The result of all these changes was that Her Majesty's —th found themselves, much to their disgust, in Manchester one fine day, having been sent there to relieve a regiment told off for the East.

Miss Smerdon, who happened to be staying with the Lyndens, picked up the news in the course of her morning walk. Nearly a year had elapsed since the great walking match, and Frances Smerdon had seen a good of the —th since then, but it so happened Miss Lynden had not. She had paid one short visit in the autumn, but the only one of the officers from Newport she had met during that

time was Captain Byng. Frances laughed at the time and said, "It's not my fault, Nell, I assure you we asked your hero to dinner, but he's away on leave somewhere, and I could not catch him."

"Oh, you may laugh at my hero," rejoined the girl gravely, "but they will all have a chance of being heroes shortly."

"Why, nobody thinks there is going to be a war, really," exclaimed Miss Smerdon.

"Oh, yes, Frances, they do. My father does for one. He not only thinks there'll be war, but a big war too."

"But even if there should be, the —th are not under orders for it, and I hope they won't be. I don't want to think my friends, my partners, men whose hands have only lately pressed mine, are carrying their lives in their hands."

"They'd not thank you for wishing them out of it," cried Miss Lynden as her eyes sparkled. "Didn't you hear that spirited new song the other night, 'Boot and saddle, the pickets are in,' how the officer who sang it gave out the line, 'And we're not the lads to leave out of the dance.' I can understand a soldier would feel that; however, your Newport friends needn't fret. If war is really meant, as my father thinks, he says none of the soldiers need trouble themselves about their not going out, they will all find themselves there before long."

"Ah well, I can only hope Dr. Lynden's wrong," said Miss Smerdon, "and now give me some lunch, for I am nearly starving."

CHAPTER III.

“BLUE BEARD’S CHAMBER.”

MISS SMERDON had become a great favourite with the Doctor, and his daughter would often say jestingly that Frances could turn him round her finger. Indeed, Nellie sometimes affected to be jealous, and declared that she believed her friend would wind up by becoming her mamma. This, however, was the merest badinage, still the young lady was undoubtedly a great favourite with the Doctor, and could coax him into pretty nearly what she pleased. On one point only was the Doctor inflexible; he would not show her what she denominated “Blue Beard’s chamber.” She had asked to see it in the first instance in the idlest spirit of curiosity. It was a wet day. She felt dull, or something of that sort. The Doctor parried her request in good-humoured fashion. He read her a lecture on the sin of being inquisitive, but he did not show her his den. This only stimulated the girl’s desire to see the inside of the laboratory. She returned to the charge again and again, and though Frances was always assured the Doctor could refuse her nothing, she discovered that he could, and most decidedly too. Frances Smerdon said nothing; she did not even tell her

friend, but she registered a vow in her own breast that if she ever did get the opportunity, she would investigate the laboratory pretty thoroughly. She questioned Nellie as to whether she had ever been inside it, and the girl's reply was only once, and then for a very few minutes. "I never was in any other laboratory, but I suppose they are all much alike. A sort of cooking-range, a small furnace, and all sorts of queer-shaped glass bottles."

Miss Smerdon considered. She also had never seen a laboratory.

"I recollect," she murmured, "hearing a gentleman say, it was with regard to invitations, that he always went everywhere he was asked, once, on the same principle that you should see everything once, of course, therefore it's my business to see a laboratory once if I can." However, an opportunity to get inside the Doctor's den did not seem likely to present itself. She had coaxed him, and pledged herself not to be frightened at anything she might see inside, even skeletons; but it was no use: the Doctor was inflexible. She enquired of Nellie if anybody was ever admitted there.

"A few pupils of chemistry who come to him from the outside and whom I never see, and also Phybbs the housemaid, but Phybbs' visits are rare, and are only made under my father's immediate superintendence."

From that instant Phybbs became invested with considerable interest in the eyes of Miss Smerdon.

as one versed in the Asian mysteries. She even condescended to converse with Phybbs on the subject, which was quite contrary to Miss Smerdon’s usual habits, as though considerate she was given to keeping a stiff upper lip with servants. It was odd that her curiosity should be so excited about such a trifle, but she was a rather spoilt young woman, accustomed to have her own way in everything, and moreover, it is just about these very trifles we do become so painfully exercised. What she had gathered from Nellie and Phybbs ought to have satisfied her, but it did not. The Doctor spent a great deal of his time in his laboratory, and Frances Smerdon pictured him as perpetually transmuting baser metals into gold, seeking for the philosopher’s stone, or indulging in the darker mysteries of the Rosicrucians. Who were these pupils that Nellie spoke of? Disciples, of course, she ought to have called them; for gifted with a vivid imagination, Miss Smerdon was rapidly investing the Doctor with supernatural powers, and believing him to be the head of a sect. She was a girl with a very romantic kink in her brain, and had built all these visions in her own mind on the plain prosaic fact that her host was an elderly gentleman, who dabbled in chemistry, and did not want his retorts and crucibles meddled with.

However, Miss Smerdon had not much time to indulge in further imaginings. The embarkation of

the troops caused a feeling through England that she did not perhaps make enough of her soldiers. If we were going to war—and practical people said we were virtually at war at that very time, although perhaps not a shot would be fired—still it behoved the nation to send forth her army handsomely. There might be bitter tears to shed, even over victories, should real fighting ever begin; but at the present moment there was a deal of “Rule Britannia” about, “Britons never, never shall be slaves,” and all that sort of thing. It was right that our young heroes should be feasted before going into the lists—destined to be heroes in real earnest too, whether in life or death, many of them. But all this was in futurity. At present the banners waved, the bands played, the crowd cheered, the officers dined and danced, and war was apparently one of the most light-hearted of pastimes. There had been much talk of giving a great ball to the regiment which the —th had relieved, but soldiers get scant warning on these occasions, and unfortunately the proposed guests were packed off to the East a little before the date fixed for the entertainment. “What was to be done?” said the committee. “We have excited society in Manchester, and society must be satisfied. Postpone the ball we may, to put it off altogether is impossible.” Then arose in that committee a hard practical man, who opined that one regiment was as good as another—in his heart he considered they

were all expensive encumbrances. As long as the Manchester ladies got their ball, they would be content. As long as their partners have red coats, girls don't trouble their heads about who is inside of them. Ask the new regiment instead of the old, it will all come to the same thing. And so it came about that no sooner had they appeared in Manchester than the —th found themselves fêted in all directions. It was necessary, of course, to make the acquaintance of the new-comers before this ball, given in their honour, took place. The young ladies of the city were most positive on this point, and the result was the humblest subaltern of the —th found himself committed to as many engagements as in these days falls to the lot of an African explorer.

"I tell you what, old man," exclaimed Byng, as he lounged in the ante-room one morning after parade, "it's well for you that you hadn't two or three weeks in Manchester before you backed yourself for your big walk. They can't mean us for active service, or they would never have sent us to such a Capua as this. Last night's the fifth night I've dined out this week. Do you? Well, if turtle, champagne, punch——"

"Are little comforts you will find the Government don't provide on active service," exclaimed Fleming, laughing.

"No," returned the other. "By-the-way, I took in to dinner a very nice-looking girl, who mani-

fested an undue interest in your unworthy self—Miss Lynden.”

“Don’t know her—never even heard of her,” replied Hugh Fleming sententiously.

“Well, you needn’t crow, young man. She never saw you but once, and whatever you may think of your personal appearance, you weren’t looking your best then.”

“When was that?” asked Hugh.

“She saw you finish your match,” replied Byng. “Didn’t look much of it myself just then, but you—a shambling, broken-down tramp was the only possible description of you.”

“Don’t be personal, man,” rejoined Hugh. “I’ve a hazy recollection of passing a carriage with some ladies in it. I wonder how she knew my name?”

“Oh, she was staying with the Smerdons. She often stays with them, and you were a local celebrity for a few days, remember. Miss Smerdon was there last night. Everyone was raving about this ball. I tell you what, my children,” continued Byng, addressing the little knot of officers in the ante-room, “soldiers are up, they’ve touched about the top price they’ve ever been at since I’ve been in the service. Manchester is popularly supposed to abound in heiresses—obvious deduction. Take advantage of your opportunities, and bless you, etc.” And here Byng extended his hands after the manner of the conventional stage father.

The evening of the ball arrived. It really had aroused great enthusiasm. Romantic young ladies declared it put them in mind of the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball at Brussels the night before Waterloo, looked up "Childe Harold," and quoted:

"There was mounting in, hot haste."

But these were the exception. Generally the younger portion of the community looked forward to a capital dance, and the elder to a capital supper. Miss Smerdon and Nellie were of course there under the charge of Mrs. Montague, and Miss Smerdon was most thoroughly mistress of the situation. Not only had Mrs. Montague a large acquaintance, but Frances was well-known and popular with the officers of the —th. The two girls were speedily in great request, and it was not long before Miss Smerdon brought up Hugh Fleming to be introduced to her friend.

"Capital ball, Miss Lynden," said Fleming, as he led her away to join the dancers, "but Manchester strikes me as having gone mad. The whole thing seems so utterly unreal. I can't help feeling that I'm the shallowest of impostors."

"I don't understand you," said the girl.

"What I mean is this," said Fleming, "Manchester is fêting us, dining us, giving us this ball, all just as if we'd done something. Not only we haven't, not only we never may, but we may never

even have the chance. I always feel that I'm dining out under false pretences."

"Very proper of you to say so, but you're wrong all the same. I'll admit that in a vulgar sense, you are discounting your laurels before you've won them, but you will have your opportunity before long, and English women have no doubt about English soldiers winning the bays when the chance comes."

"Very prettily put, Miss Lynden, but you may do any amount of hard fighting without distinguishing yourself."

"You're a little selfish, Mr. Fleming," said the young lady smiling. "As the individual, yes; as a regiment, no; and you soldiers are very proud of the corps to which you belong, are you not?"

"Yes, there are two things a man seldom loses his sympathy for, his old school, and his old regiment. While he's in it, it's the one regiment."

"Yes, I've seen enough of you military men to know that."

"One of our weaknesses," laughed Fleming, as he put his arm round her waist and whirled her off to the inspiring strains of "The Sturm Marsch."

Nell Lynden was looking extremely well that evening. If not a pretty girl, she was at all events a decidedly attractive one, as with dark chestnut hair, bright hazel eyes, good teeth, and a neat figure, she could not well help being.

She was not accomplished, but there were some

two or three things that Nell could do to perfection. Her waltzing was the poetry of motion. She had not much voice, but to hear her warble an old English ballad, in those low contralto tones of hers, would stir most men's pulses. She was a very self-reliant girl, partly by nature, but still more so by her bringing up. She had never met with ill-treatment or unkindness, but for all that she had always regarded herself as a friendless little Arab, with only herself to depend upon. Indeed Frances Smerdon was the only intimate friend of her own sex she had ever made ; and there was one side of Frances' character which she was incapable of understanding, and that was the imaginative side of her disposition. People of this very sanguine temperament can never control themselves, nor even in old age utterly abandon the habit. They build their castles in the air on the largest scale and upon the slenderest foundations, and constantly as these Chateaux d'Espagne come tumbling about their ears they are neither discouraged nor disconcerted.

"Well, Miss Lynden," said Fleming, as their valse finished, he took his charge back to her chaperone, "I hope your prophecy may prove true—that we shall have the opportunity of winning our laurels before the year's out, and also that individually I shall be quick enough to snatch at mine when the chance comes."

"You've got one grand quality for a soldier, Mr

Fleming," replied the girl, laughing—"dogged pertinacity. You would never have won that walking match if you hadn't. It would be hard to convince you that you were beaten, about anything."

"I don't like giving in," replied Hugh.

"Neither do I," returned the girl. "We are both what our friends, Mr. Fleming, call obstinate."

That the war should be the ruling topic of conversation was inevitable. A considerable part of the English people still found it difficult to believe that we really were at war—destined to remain in that belief too, for some months to come. The men of that time knew from their fathers how England had rung with the news of victories, when the century was young, and fully expected news of a great battle before six weeks were over. But things are not done quite so quickly as all that. Where to bring off a fight, used to be a knotty problem in the latter days of the prize-ring, and this was just the point which at the present moment puzzled our rulers. Russia vaguely told us to come on, but had inconsiderately forgotten to name where the combat was to take place.

Miss Smerdon, as we know, had no belief that there would ever be actual hostilities, and she was rather chaffing Byng on obtaining hospitality under false pretences, indeed it really was a joke in the regiment at their being fêted, mainly because their predecessors had been sent campaigning.

"Ah, you can chaff us, Miss Smerdon," said Byng, "but we really have a good deal the best of the joke ; you see we've got the cakes and ale, and may never gather the laurels."

"There, never mind the war," replied Frances, "let's talk about something else. You know Miss Lynden, you've met her at our house."

"Certainly," rejoined Byng ; "not a girl one is at all likely to forget."

"Have you ever met Doctor Lynden ?"

"Only once, and that was at a small bachelor dinner, and how I was included in that to the present moment I can't imagine. They were a scientific lot, and how they came to think that a Captain of Infantry was a savant, I can't conceive."

"Now tell me all about it, Captain Byng. This interests me."

"More than it did me," rejoined the soldier. "They talked a good deal about things a little over my head. Nothing for it but the old magpie dodge, you know. I didn't talk much, but I thought the more. I know I got through no end of claret."

"Nonsense, Captain Byng, you must know what they talked about, and I particularly want to know."

"Well, chemical discoveries, new beliefs, and all sorts of things you never hear at a mess-table. Blest if I don't think every one of the party had a religion of his own——"

"Except yourself," said Miss Smerdon, sweetly, "but you surely can recollect some of the talk if you try, Captain Byng."

"Indeed, I can't, my sole recollection of that evening was, that it was dull, that the claret was good, and that I was there by mistake."

"It's very provoking. You know I am staying here with the Lyndens. The Doctor is a charming old man, but I'm dreadfully curious about him."

"Clever old fellow," replied Byng, "they're all too clever for me, but I'm bound to say I don't think Doctor Lynden would have gone on propounding his rigmarole theories if the others had left him alone."

"I only wish I had had half your opportunity," rejoined Miss Smerdon. "Now take me back to Mrs. Montague, please, for it's getting late, and I daresay she's wanting to go home."

Byng did as he was bid, and as he wished his fair partner "good night," marvelled much in what way he had missed his opportunity. It was impossible for him to know the theory that Miss Smerdon's vivid imagination had conceived concerning her host, and that she regarded Captain Byng as having been present at a secret conclave of adepts in mysticism.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTABLE TARRANT.

"YOU see, Pollie, I'm a man of inteilect, that's what I am. I may be only an ordinary police-constable now, but my chance will come, and then you'll see a lot about this 'active and intelligent officer,' and all the other clap-trap."

"Of course you are, Dick, everybody knows you are awfully clever," and Miss Phybbs looked admiringly at the sandy-haired young man in a policeman's uniform with whom she was walking.

Constable Tarrant looked at her suspiciously for a moment. He was quite aware his talents were not so universally admitted as Polly suggested. But he was a young man with a very excellent opinion of himself, and though, during the two years he had been in the force, nothing had taken place to afford any grounds for the belief, he was certainly firmly impressed with the idea that he was destined to achieve greatness in the career upon which he had embarked. Polly Phybbs was a thin-lipped, black beady-eyed young woman, a trustworthy capable servant and with no weakness about her excepting her love for this cousin of hers, Richard Tarrant. Whatever he said was law to her. She was four or five years his senior, and he had made love to her from the

time he was fifteen, not very disinterested love either, for from the very commencement he had utilised her in every possible way. He invested her with the general supervision of his wardrobe, let her wait upon him, and work for him, and spent a considerable portion of her wages for her to boot. A sharp, hard-working girl, she was never long out of a good situation, and might by this have saved money if it had not been for her infatuation for her cousin ; shrewd though she was on all other matters, on this point she was blind. Though a smart-looking girl with a rather neat figure, nobody could call her good-looking. It might be that she attracted no other sweetheart, but certain it is that she had been for the last seven or eight years completely devoted to Richard Tarrant. When, after having failed twice or thrice in his attempts to get a living, Dick succeeded in getting into the police force, she quite believed that it was due to the display of considerable talent on his part, and felt quite sure that he would sooner or later distinguish himself. She was not pledged to be married to him, but he was her young man, and she quite understood that they would be married some of these days—some of these days being interpreted into such time as she should have saved money enough to start housekeeping on.

“Now,” said Dick, “you see in my profession ”
—Police Constable Tarrant was given to speaking

grandiloquently of his calling—"a fellow's only got to keep his eyes open, and his turn must come. Now you know, Polly, I always was a regular wonner for observing."

Polly dutifully assented, although she could call to mind no particular recollections of this faculty in her cousin.

"I notice everything. If I see a chap loitering, I says to myself at once: 'Now, what's he loitering for?' He don't gammon me that he's tired and his boots hurt him. 'On you go, my man,' says I. Bless you, he might be keeping watch while two or three of his pals commit a burglary. No, no, my girl, my eye is everywhere, and when your eye's everywhere you're bound—well, you're bound to see something at last," concluded Mr. Tarrant, rather feebly.

It did not occur to Polly that in a big city like Manchester those gimlet eyes of Constable Tarrant's ought, in the course of two years, to have detected crime of some nature. Dick had never told her of any such success, neither had he told her of a pretty sharp reprimand he had received from his superiors when a gentleman's watch was snatched almost under his very nose, without attracting his observation.

"Now," resumed Tarrant, "this master of yours is a queer sort of a man. What can he want with a side door to his house? You see all these villa residences are built exactly alike except your

house. Now, who is Doctor Lynden that he should have a side door all to himself? That's what I want to know."

"Lor', Dick, my master's as quiet an old gentleman as you'd meet anywhere; there's no harm in him."

"That's your unsuspecting nature," replied the constable, loftily. "The law is suspicious; the police, which is an arm of the law, is suspicious too—me, I'm suspicious—it's my duty."

"I tell you what, it's all nonsense your being suspicious of master; and as for Miss Lynden, she is as sweet a young lady as ever I saw——"

"Don't rile me, Polly; you'll make me suspicious of you next. I tell you, sometimes when I've been hanging about here after you, I've seen two or three suspicious characters go in at that side door."

"What do you call suspicious characters, Dick?"

"They were men," replied Constable Tarrant, glaring at his companion in a most Othello-like manner.

"Some of master's chemical friends most likely," suggested Miss Phybbs.

"Friends! Lovers—lovers of yours!" exclaimed Tarrant, with a burst of well-acted jealousy.

"Now, don't be foolish, Dick; you know I care for nobody but you. Men do come in at times by that door to see master. It was built on purpose; they are friends interested in his experiments, and go straight to the chemical room without going through the house."

"Polly," said Tarrant, endeavouring to call up a look of preternatural sagacity, "your master's conduct is suspicious. It's your duty to the public to keep your eye on him. It's your duty to me to keep your eye on him."

"I assure you you're all wrong. My master's a quiet, harmless old gentleman, who shuts himself in with his pots and pans, and blows himself up occasionally. I go in now and then, when he's there, but bless you, there's nothing to see in the room."

"It's not likely a woman would see anything in it. It would look very different, no doubt, to a police officer."

"But what is it you suspect the doctor of doing?"

"That's it," replied Constable Tarrant. "I suspect him; it doesn't signify what of, at present. Keep your eye on him, Polly."

Polly laughed as she replied: "Of course I will, if you tell me to, and now I must run away. Kiss me, Dick, before I go, and don't be long before you come and see me again." And their embrace over, Miss Phybbs sped home, conscious that she had considerably exceeded the time for which she had been granted leave of absence.

"I don't know what he's up to. I don't know what his little game is, but the circumstances are suspicious," said Mr. Tarrant, as he walked quickly back to his own dwelling. "Let's reckon it all

up," he continued, stopping and placing the forefinger of his right hand solemnly on the palm of his left. "First, you've a doctor with no visible means of earning his living, verdict on that, rum, and I only wish I knew how he did it. Secondly, he has a private room, into which nobody is ever allowed to go, rummer. Lastly, he's a private stair, and a private door (What does' he want with a private door?), rummest. Men go in by day, what goes in by night?" there was a pause of some seconds, and then Mr. Tarrant suddenly laid the forefinger of his right hand against the side of his nose, winked at an imaginary audience, and ejaculated "Bodies!"

* * * * *

Doctor Lynden meanwhile continues the harmless tenor of his way, dining out occasionally, and for the most part with the savants of Manchester, among whom he is now generally well-known. He spends a good deal of time in his laboratory, in experiments, presumably, the result of which has not yet been published to the outside world. That Miss Smerdon has a strong girlish curiosity to see the inside of his den he knows, but he little thinks what that imaginative young lady pictures his real life. Still further would he have been astonished to hear that a rather thick-headed young policeman was also taking a lively interest in his proceedings. At the former he would probably have only laughed; but had he been cognisant of the latter,

he would doubtless have been seriously annoyed. Nobody cares to be under the observation of the police—the guilty naturally dislike it ; the innocent fiercely resent it ! but to find oneself under the self-imposed surveillance of a young police constable would exasperate most men. Fortunately for his peace of mind, Doctor Lynden is in blissful ignorance of there even being such a person as Police Constable Tarrant, at present.

But the summer slips away. Miss Smerdon has long ago gone back to her home. The army has moved from Gallipoli to Varna, but still those bulletins of “Glorious victory,” for which the British public yearn, are not forthcoming. The cavalry has lost a good many men and horses from an expedition into the unhealthy Dobrutschka, but of actual crossing of swords and exchanging shots there has been none ; still rumour has it that both French and English fleets, with innumerable transports, have all been collected at Varna, that such a flotilla has not been seen since the days of the Armada ; and, indeed, that probably would have seemed a very small affair compared to that assembled in the Black Sea under the flags of the allies.

Russia has long ago yielded the naval supremacy and is destined ere long to make grim reparation to the Turks for Sinope, by voluntarily sinking her own fleet in the mouth of Sebastopol Harbour. That an expedition of some sort has been decided upon, that the combined forces of French and

English are about to embark and the war to commence in bitter earnest, is now well-known, though the exact destination of the expedition is kept as secret as possible. But let it land where it will, it will be upon Russian soil, and that a pitched battle will speedily follow, is confidently predicted. This time the Quid Nuncs are right, another week or two and all England will ring with the victory of the Alma. A little longer, and men will look grimly and women weep over those terrible lists of killed and wounded which inevitably follow all glorious victories. Men think sadly of many a good fellow who they will never clasp hands with more, and maidens think sadly of friends who had been rather more than friends, to them but a few months back; and who they had dreamed might in the future be something dearer still. But those who conduct wars have no time for sentiment; the ravening monster requires perpetual fresh food for his insatiable maw, and the sole thought of the authorities is how the losses are to be made good—how to fill the places of those who have fallen; and it is already evident to all military men that to find the necessary reinforcements will tax our small army to the utmost. Men who are fretting their hearts out because they have been so far “left out of the dance” now grow jubilant. They feel that it cannot be long before they are called upon to bear their part. Then comes the false report of the fall of Sebastopol, and these restless spirits are

filled with alarm lest the whole thing should be over without their having anything to do with it. But that canard is soon exploded, and when the real state of things becomes known, England generally awakes to the fact that this is no military promenade, but that if she is seeking a big war, she has got it. A few weeks more, and home comes the story of Inkermann, and when the bulletins of that glorious but grisly battle are read—accounts of such fierce hand-to-hand fighting as recalled the storming of Badajos, and other such scenes in the Peninsular war—sensible men could no longer doubt we were committed to the biggest struggle we had been engaged in since the Titan was caged at St. Helena. The country has woke up in earnest now, and not only is every available soldier in the United Kingdom hurried to the front but from all parts of the Empire, England's sons are summoned to her aid.

It is needless to say that the —th had received marching orders ; they were to go to Malta in the first instance, thence to be pushed on to the Crimea in the early spring. Hard-worked and hard-pressed though the army at the front was, yet the authorities found they were hard put to it to feed it, dreadfully depleted though its ranks were.

Some months had elapsed since that great ball which inaugurated their arrival in Manchester had been given to her Majesty's —th, and in that time the officers had naturally become intimate

with the people of the place. Miss Lynden for instance had become well-known to several of them, but the most persistent visitor at the doctor's house was Hugh Fleming. He made no disguise to himself that he was falling deeply in love. He knew, and if he didn't it would have been for no want of telling, that what his chum, Tom Byng, was continually dinning in his ears was true, that there was no higher pinnacle of folly than the committal of matrimony by a subaltern in the army; that as matters stood at present, all love-making ought to be punished by court martial; that a man just going out to fight for his Queen and country, for pay and plunder, for glory and promotion, to be whispering love-speeches was criminal with no extenuating circumstance, and deserved to be met by placing a bandage round the culprit's eyes and interviewing him with a few file of loaded muskets, at the back of the barrack square.

"Why do I tell you all this, young 'un? Why do I keep pitching into you, d—n it? because you want it! You're getting spoons, disgusting spoons, awful spoons, on Miss Lynden; that's a nice thing to do, as things are at present, for a young man who is legally supposed to have come to years of discretion."

"Shut up, Tom; we're old friends, and I don't want to quarrel, but I won't hear anything against Miss Lynden."

"Who wants to say anything against Miss

Lynden? She is just the nicest girl I know, and that's the only excuse for your selfishness and folly. I suppose you think you're behaving well to the girl you profess to love, by bringing her heart into her mouth every time she hears the news-man yelling out, 'Glorious victory,' to make her heart jump and her colour come and go whenever she hears the Crimean mail is in, and finally, to make her cry her eyes out because your worthless carcass has been riddled by Russian bullets."

"Well, Tom," rejoined Fleming, laughing, "it's to be devoutly hoped that you are not gifted with second sight, because the view you are taking of my immediate future is, to put it mildly, unpleasant. Why am I more likely to be shot than you, I should like to know? You're much more likely to run your thick head into danger than I am."

"A palpable miserable evasion of the question," returned Byng. "You're getting desperately spoony on Miss Lynden, and, worse still, you are letting her know it. It's not right; bottle your feelings up, repress your emotions as I do; do you suppose you're the only fellow who's——" and here the speaker stopped abruptly, conscious of having in his zeal said more than he meant.

"No other fellow what?" ejaculated Fleming in considerable surprise.

"Never mind, nothing; remember what I have said—drop making love to Miss Lynden," and with

these words, Byng somewhat hastily left his friend's room.

I daresay Byng's advice was theoretically good, but human nature is wont to play the very deuce with theories. There is nothing like a big war to precipitate matters of this kind, and it is just when the love words ought not to be spoken that our feelings get beyond our control, and those love words slip out which are never forgotten. Ah, well, I doubt if those from whose eyes the tears are destined to flow, those who are doomed to mourn their dead, would have had it otherwise. There is something sweet in those sorrowful memories :

“For the mark of rank in nature
Is capacity for pain,
And the anguish of the singer
Makes the sweetness of the strain.”

CHAPTER V.

MISS SMERDON GROWS SARCASTIC.

“THEY have come at last, as you always said they would,” exclaimed Hugh Fleming, as he entered the Lyndens' drawing-room one gloomy day about the middle of November, “our orders for the East.”

“Yes, I thought so,” replied the young lady, as she shook hands, but in by no means the exultant tones with which people usually greet the fulfil-

ment of their prophecies. Who of us have not suffered from that ever recurring, usually detestable, "I told you so?" How is it that our accession to the rewards of this life are never announced beforehand, while its evils and misfortunes are so industriously foretold to us?

Hugh Fleming should have been in high spirits at having attained his heart's desire, but somehow he was not. He had come to pay a farewell visit—he had had a good many to pay, and had put saying good-bye to the Lyndens off to the last. Good-bye, when it is for an indefinite period, is often a painful thing to say, even though it is mercifully veiled from us that it is good-bye for ever. Still no such thought oppressed Hugh's mind on this occasion. He was off to the Crimea, of course, everyone who wore a sword was bound to go there now, he would come back again in due time, a captain, perhaps a major, who knows? But he was quite conscious that saying farewell to Nellie Lynden was the hardest task that had ever fallen to his lot yet. He knew that he loved her dearly, he knew that he ought not to tell her so, and yet he was guiltily conscious that, if not in words, he had been telling her so for some weeks past, as if a genuine love story is not told long before it is put into matter-of-fact words. "I love you," requires no speech to proclaim it, and put what guard we may upon our tongues, no woman needs their assistance to learn it. After

the first conventional speeches, a silence fell upon those two. It was not that, as a rule, they had not plenty to say to each other, but of late they had found the keeping up the ordinary stream of talk wearisome. Both were conscious that there was a barrier which had not been broken ; but what they had both known it must end in, had come at last. The word "good-bye" had to be spoken ; the initiative was with Hugh, and he was sore puzzled how to begin.

I once heard a well-known soldier who had won for himself countless decorations, asked in a club smoking-room what was the nastiest bit of work he had ever had. He paused a little before he answered, and it was easy to see that he was recalling the scene to his mind's eye. "Breaking to a lady," he replied at last, "that her husband had been killed at the head of the stormers that morning." Bidding good-bye to the woman he loves is the hardest thing for a soldier when ordered on active service.

"I suppose they have given you very short notice, to finish with," said Miss Lynden, woman-like, the first to relieve the awkwardness of the situation.

"Yes," rejoined Hugh ; "we are all supposed to be ready to go now at a moment's notice. We embark at Liverpool the day after to-morrow. Of course, we're glad to go ; but we're sorry to say good-bye to so many who've—who've been kind to us."

"We shall miss you all very much. I hear we're to be left quite forlorn for the present, as you are not to be replaced. Is that so?"

Hugh felt the situation was intolerable.

"I don't know, and I don't care," he replied passionately. "I know I oughtn't to say it, Nell—you will let me call you Nell for the last time—won't you?"

Her lips moved slightly, but she made no reply.

"I ought not to say it, Nell, I know," he continued, "but I cannot go out there without telling you I love you. I am not going to ask you to promise yourself to me, I will only ask you to think of me, and to think kindly of me. Remember, when you read any account of our doings out there—remember, there is one amongst us who can never forget you, and if ever I do anything that brings me into notice, promise to send me just one line of congratulation."

It has been before mentioned that Nell Lynden was a quiet, possessed, self-reliant young woman, but it is just these self-reliant heroines who disappoint one so cruelly at the crucial moment. If she was self-reliant she was also a warm-hearted girl, and (I apologise for her) all she did at this critical moment was to burst into a flood of tears and gasp out—"Oh, Hugh!"

For a moment Hugh Fleming was dismayed—tears usually do discompose a man—and deeply repented him of his rash avowal, but when he saw

Nellie smile through her tears it gave him the courage to become practical, and passing his arm round her waist he did what was obviously his duty under the circumstances — kissed them away.

“ It was very foolish of me I know, Hugh,” said the girl at last, “ I know you must go, but it seems bitter to part from you just now ; no doubt there are scores of women in my place, still, remember what those terrible lists are to us. Ah, it was bad enough to read them after the Alma and Inkermann, but when you are out there, my own, the very rumours of fighting will make my heart turn sick.”

“ Nell, Nell, this will never do, remember my darling you are a soldier’s sweetheart now.”

“ I know,” she replied, smiling, “ and I am not going to be foolish any longer. But Hugh, I’ve hardly had time yet to get used to the position. You will let me come to Liverpool and see you off, won’t you ? ”

“ No, I think not ; you see there is no time to announce our engagement now, and I can’t bear to think of you in the turmoil there’s sure to be, all by yourself.”

“ I don’t care who knows of our engagement,” exclaimed the girl, proudly.

“ No, Nell,” replied Fleming, “ but that’s just where it is, they will see you down at the docks and won’t know of it.”

“Nor do I care about that, but I do care very much about seeing the last of you.”

“I can’t help it, replied Hugh, “you must be guided by me in this matter. No, Nell, my dear, we will say our good-byes here. There is one thing, you know, we can write to each other by every mail.”

“Ah, yes, and mind you do so. I may keep you to myself the whole afternoon now, may I not?”

“Willingly,” rejoined Fleming. “I am your prisoner for the rest of the day if you choose. I suppose I had better tell your father?”

“That shall be as you think best. If you don’t, I must; but Hugh, what will your own people say about it?”

“Well, you see,” he replied, “I’ve kept pretty straight and never given them any trouble since I joined, then, further than saying that I ought to wait till I have got higher in my profession, what can they do, except congratulate me? Besides if, instead of the sweetest girl in England, I was about to introduce a Gorgon to the family they couldn’t say anything to me just now; why the most peccant amongst us are voted white as snow nowadays; the most uncompromising fathers have granted plenary absolution.”

“It will be a sore trouble to me if your people are very much opposed to our engagement,” said the girl, thoughtfully.

“But you will stick to me, Nell, won’t you?” he asked anxiously.

"Yes," she replied. "I'm yours for ever ; let it be as long as it may before you come to claim me ; but I own I am nervous about what your people will think of it."

Hugh now set himself earnestly to dissipate any misgivings Miss Lynden might have upon that score. It is unnecessary to follow the conversation of the lovers further ; suffice it to say that Hugh Fleming was absent from the temporary mess which the —th had established at the "Queen's Hotel," nor did any of his brother officers set eyes on him that night.

The next day was their last in Manchester, and what time they could snatch from duty was filled by saying once more those "last good-byes," which people always feel impelled to speak when leaving their native country. Hugh, therefore, saw little of his brother officers all that day, and embarked next day, hugging his secret closely to his own breast.

But there never was a man in love who did not crave to impart his madness to somebody, and few amongst us have not some friend who, though to some extent the confidant of our hopes and aspirations, is still oftener a recipient of our follies and vexations. It was so with Hugh, and by the time they had "rolled through the gut of Gibraltar," Tom Byng was fully acquainted with the story of his subaltern's love.

"Well, you've done it now," he remarked ; "and

all I have got to do is to offer you my hearty congratulations. Please to forget all I ever said to you on the subject; what one says to a man before he does a thing is totally inapplicable after he has done it. If this wind lasts, we shall be at Malta in no time. I wonder where they will put us up?"

"From what those fellows told us at Gib., they must be pretty full there."

"Full!" exclaimed Byng. "Packed like sardines in a box, I am told; and tents in the open will most likely be our lot, Never mind; it's all on the way to the Crimea, and as for tents! why there's nothing like getting used to them while we have leisure."

"Malta, indeed, was as full just then as it could hold. Its hotels were thronged with people curious to hear the latest rumours from the seat of war—women anxious about sons and husbands. Sick and wounded officers invalided down from the front told direful tales of the difficulties of getting up provisions to the plateau still grimly held by the Allies. Both sides seemed to have stopped for breath after the furious struggle of Inkermann, and it was now rather an open question as to which were besiegers and which were besieged—whether we were investing Sebastopol, or whether the Russians had not invested the entrenched camp of the Allies. At Malta, of course, supplies were plentiful, and it really seemed almost a mockery

that men were living well on that sun-baked rock, while their brethren but a little way off were near starving on the storm-swept plateau of the Chersonese. That half-dozen miles of almost trackless mire between Balaklava and the front quite explained why it was so. *Dum vivimus vivamus*, and Malta was never gayer than it was that winter. Even those most anxious to join their comrades already in front of Sebastopol were fain to confess that there was nothing doing up there at present. As far as the English were concerned, it was the same weary monotonous trench work, only relieved by an occasional sortie. With our Allies it was different. Stronger handed than ourselves, the French persistently continued to sap up to the Bastion de Mat—a proceeding to which the enemy offered fierce and jealous opposition.

Still everyone knew that nothing of any consequence could be attempted till the Spring. Whenever British regiments are gathered together, they are sure to develope three of our national particularities, they are certain to start cricket, racing, and theatricals. If it was the wrong time of year for cricket and racing, private theatricals were just the thing, and no less than two companies were organised that winter. Hugh Fleming greatly distinguished himself in one of these, and his Crepin, in *The Wonderful Woman*, was pronounced to have soared quite above the range of the ordinary

amateur. But though Hugh's face flushed with pleasure at seeing himself favourably noticed in print, yet there was mingled with it a half-contempt that he should be engaged in such frivolities. This was not what he came out to do. Such pinchbeck laurels were not the things he had promised himself to lay at Nell Lynden's feet. He had yet to learn that the more you can combine relaxation with the serious business of fighting, the better for everyone; take your men out of themselves, let their trade be what it will, if you want to get the maximum of work out of them. And the successful representative of Acres will most likely be well to the front in a hand-to-hand *mêlée* not forty-eight hours afterwards.

Those were halcyon days for Hugh; nearly every mail brought him letters from Nellie, in which passionate love was mingled with all the chit-chat about those he knew in Manchester. "I hear constantly," she said in one of her letters, "from Frances Smerdon. What have you, or at all events some of you, done to her? She is so bitter against you all. I heard from her only the other day, and she made me quite angry. 'As for the poor —th,' she said, 'we need not fret about them, there is always a cessation of hostilities when they appear upon the scene. Papa says that he thinks nothing more will take place, and that a peace will be patched up in the Spring. No, we needn't be anxious about the —th; they are very

nice fellows, but they are not a *fighting* regiment, my dear.' "

Now if this had angered Nellie Lynden, it had stung Hugh Fleming to the quick. It was a gibe about which all the men of the corps were very sensitive. They were as smart a regiment as there was in the service, and one of the seniors of the Army List, but there remained the bitter fact that they had hardly the name of a battle emblazoned on their colours. It was luck ; while some regiments seemed always in the way when hard fighting was going on, others, from no fault of their own, seemed never to hand on such occasion ; the same with individuals, though having once gained distinction, a man can to some extent force himself forward ; yet many a young soldier has panted for the opportunity never vouchsafed him. The oburgation that escaped from Hugh's lips as he read this was anything but complimentary to Miss Smerdon. Although they had made jests in Manchester, of the premature way in which they had been *fêted*, yet there had always been a tinge of soreness at the bottom of their hearts, arising from this very subject, and had anybody thought of connecting the two, and chaffing them about it, he would have aroused the wrath of the corps with a vengeance. Hugh pondered for a little as to what could have drawn forth Miss Smerdon's sarcasm. Her father had been very hospitable to the regiment during their stay at Newport, and she

herself had been popular with all of them. What could have made her turn round and taunt her old friends in this fashion?

However, Spring at last made its appearance, and despite Mr. Smerdon's prophecy brought with it neither dove nor olive-branch, but an order for Her Majesty's —th to proceed, amongst the very first reinforcements, to the front. The sun shone brightly as they steamed out of Valetta Harbour. And all signs of that dreary winter seemed to have vanished. As Tom Byng said, "By Jove, how those fellows before Sebastopol must revel in this! How they must kick up their heels after all they have gone through."

Across the bright dancing waters of the Mediterranean the good ship rapidly makes her way; up the Sea of Marmora, through the Dardanelles, looking perfectly lovely in all the glory of the early spring; has a good passage up the usually stormy Euxine, and as they near Balaclava a dull monotonous boom breaks upon their ears and informs them that the belligerents have woken from their winter torpor, and though as yet somewhat leisurely, are recommencing hostilities.

"Ah, Miss Smerdon will have to take back her speech, I fancy, before long," said Byng, as they threaded their way into the crowded and landlocked harbour (Hugh had read him that extract from Nellie's letter). "I wonder whether she'd feel it should she chance to see that we've been in a

big fight, and that some of us had gone under in attempting to blazon the colour."

"Ah, she's been rather severe lately on our want of laurels."

"Yes, a girl who speaks of us as she does is not likely to cry much for us," said Byng sulkily.

Hugh eyed his chum queerly for a moment, and then, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, rejoined :

"Don't think you quite understand women—there was a lady called Beatrice and a man called Benedick."

"Never—except in Shakespeare," said Byng.

Hugh Fleming shrugged his shoulders and walked away without reply.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TAKING OF THE QUARRIES.

"HULLOA, young un," exclaimed Tom Byng, as he thrust his head into the door of Fleming's tent, "if it was some time before we got introduced to the trenches, I'll be bound to say the big wigs are doing their best to make us quite at home in them now."

"Why, you don't mean to say we find them again to-night?"

"Indeed we do, my boy, and if you've got nothing ready to eat you'd better come and feed with me at once. I don't know yet what's in the

wind, but the brigade Major, who is an old pal of mine, told me we were likely to have a very lively night of it."

"All right, I'm your man, Tom ; I shall be ready in two minutes, and then I'll come with you."

"Yes, it's sharp practice," said Tom Byng as they sat down to dinner. "I only came out of the trenches myself this morning, but it's all fair enough. These regiments that bore the brunt of the winter are reduced almost to shadows. I met a fellow the other day whose regiment is in the left attack ; he told me that they hadn't two hundred men fit for duty ; so of course the turn comes heavy upon strong regiments like ourselves. That's the sherry, help yourself and pass it on. By the way, did I tell you my adventure on the Woronzoff Road this morning ?"

"No, what was that ?" enquired Fleming.

"Well, I don't know whether you've ever been down there. The left attack fellows generally take care of it. However, for some inscrutable reason we were told off for it last night. The trench crosses the road, and we had an advanced picket of a subaltern and thirty men, covered by a *chevaux de frise*, some eighty yards or so in advance. I'm afraid it was a bit my fault, but I was new to the post, and a trifle anxious. You see, when you're told to withdraw at daybreak, it becomes rather a nice point.

"I was warned that the Russian rifle pits com-

manded my trench, and would make themselves deuced unpleasant as soon as they could see. In my anxiety not to quit my post too soon I stayed a little too late. As I withdrew my advanced picket, two or three fellows had a snap at us, but no sooner did I fall in my men and leaving the main trench proceed to march them up the road, than the rifle pits at the top here in front of the right attack, commenced squibbing. To retreat leisurely may be dignified, but it's not whist. I wasn't going to lose men if I could help it, so I gave the word to double. You know that tall Irishman, Mickey Flinn?—he was doubling alongside me when he suddenly exclaimed, 'I'm shot, Captain Byng—I'm shot.'

"'Come along, my good fellow, come along,' I cried, as I turned round to look at him. He was doubling as steady as any man in the company, and gave no sign of being wounded.

"'I'm shot, sorr,' he reiterated, and without slackening his gait.

"'Where, my good fellow,' I inquired, as we still doubled side by side. 'Where, my good fellow?—where? Come on!' I once more cried.

"'Right through the body, sorr,' he rejoined, without in the least relaxing his pace.

"'Come on!' I cried; 'come on!' And how the deuce a man shot through the body succeeded in keeping up the steady double Flinn did astonished me greatly.

“‘Yes, sorr,’ he exclaimed, continuously, ‘I’m shot ; shot clean through.’

“Well, I continued my exhortation to keep it up, in short, keep it up was the sum total of my advice, and the responses to my litany on Flinn’s part were — ‘I’m shot, sorr !—I’m shot clean through !’

“As soon as we turned the bend in the road and were out of fire, I halted my party, that Flinn’s wounds might be attended to. There was the bullet mark certainly, going straight through his great coat in front, and a hole where it had come out behind, and if ever you would have said a man had been shot through, it was Flinn.

“When we came to his tunic it was the same, but when we came to himself, there was nothing but a red mark running round his ribs. The bullet must have struck a button of his great coat in front, glanced round his body, and come out at the back. The queerest casualty I’ve seen since I’ve been at work in the trenches. The best of the joke is that Flinn’s extremely disgusted because I haven’t returned him wounded. It’s not a bit that he wants to shirk duty, but he wants to know what’s the use of being shot clean through the body if yez don’t get the credit of it.”

“Fall in the covering party !” interrupted the hoarse voice of the sergeant outside the tent.

“Time’s up !” said Byng. “Here, Stephens,” he cried to his servant, “quick, give me my revolver ! It’s a pity to be asked to an evening party, and not

be able to take part in the fun. Now Hugh, come along!"

A few minutes more, and they were wending their way to the brigade ground where the various trench guards formed up, and were formally handed over to the colonel destined to command them.

"Who commands the —th?" exclaimed the officer in question, as he got off his horse.

"I do, sir!" replied Byng, touching his cap.

"You and your fellows are for the advance to-night, and are not likely to have a dull time of it, I promise you," said the Colonel, cheerily. "The Sappers report that those rifle pits in front of our attack are getting too troublesome to be borne with any longer; we must have them to-night."

"You will find us all ready, sir," replied Byng, "as soon as you give the word to go."

The Colonel gave him a good-natured nod.

His own officers always said of Colonel Croker that you could be always sure when you were about to see sharp fighting. The Colonel's manner was so deuced pleasant.

There was a delay of some ten minutes or so before they moved off, waiting for the waning light to die as near away as might be; and then under the cover of the semi-darkness the several guards moved rapidly away to their allotted positions.

Having gained the advanced parallel, Byng collected his men, and spread them in lines along the most convenient part of the parapet.

"We'll just wait another half-hour," said the Colonel, "that all may be comfortably settled in both attacks, and then the sooner we have those Quarries the better. Your men know they will be wanted in earnest in a few minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

"And not a shot, mind, till we've got them. We'll carry them with the bayonet. Now wait for the word."

It was a still night, and the stars twinkled brightly, although the moon was not yet up. Pulses throbbed and hearts beat quick as the little band awaited the signal, keen and anxious as greyhounds in the leash. The big guns boomed at short intervals, and there was the usual spattering rifle fire going on in the French trenches, on the extreme left. Byng and his followers stood with pricked ears, and almost breathless from excitement, waiting the word to go.

Suddenly through the night air rang out the long-expected command, "—th, Forward! Charge!"

In an instant, before the bugle could sound the repetition of the order, Byng and his brother officers had bounded over the parapet, followed by their men, and with a loud hurrah dashed across the open, straight for the coveted pits. So sudden and so unexpected was their rush that the enemy had only time to discharge a few hurried shots at their assailants. A minute or two more and Byng,

Fleming, and their followers had tumbled pell-mell into the little group of rifle pits it was their object to obtain, and were engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand conflict with their tenants. A confused hurly-burly, in which oaths, bayonet thrusts, the cracking of revolvers, and an occasional death-shriek were strangely blended. It did not last long. The dash of the attack, and perhaps slight superiority of numbers, speedily told on the side of the English, and the discomfited enemy was soon seen flying back.

"Well," said Byng, complacently, as he and Fleming met at the conclusion of their little victory, "that was a very pretty scrimmage while it lasted. Well done, my lads, but don't think you won't be served with notice to quit before the night's out. This'll be a comfort to Flinn next time he is called to take a turn on the Woronzoff. I hope he's not managed to get shot through again this time."

"I'm none the worse, sorr, thank you," growled a voice from the background, "which is more than I can say for one or two of them as got in my way, but it'll take a bit more than this before the Woronzoff's pleasant for sthrolling."

"Now, Jackson, what about the casualties? Our losses are only slight, are they?" said Byng, as the colour-sergeant from the left hand company came up to make his report.

"Not very heavy, sir, as far as I can see," replied the sergeant, "but we've lost Captain Grogan."

"Grogan! Good God! killed?" said Hugh.

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant. "A shell burst just as we cleared the parapet, and a bit of it struck the Captain and killed him before he had led us a dozen yards."

"Poor fellow," muttered Byng; "you are senior subaltern down, Fleming. Go and take command of the other company. We're expected to hold this position till morning, remember, and by —— I mean to do it."

Hugh moved off in obedience to orders, and at this juncture Colonel Croker made his appearance.

"Well done — th," he exclaimed cheerily. "Now Captain Byng, you've got in and you must keep in. I've got heavy reinforcements drawn up in the fourth parallel, and shall lead them on as soon as you're attacked. Attacked you're sure to be in an hour or two, only they haven't got the range as yet." And the Colonel glanced significantly at the shells flying over their heads and bursting in all directions. "The Sappers are coming up directly to reverse the parapet and connect the pits, and the noise of their parties will still more madden the Russians."

The Colonel walked quietly back to the fourth parallel, and for the next half-hour the shot and shell flew furiously over their heads, though, like the buzzing of an irritated wasp's nest, it did but little harm. On the contrary, it served to mask the noise of the now actively engaged working party.

Then came a lull, an ominous lull it occurred to Hugh Fleming, as he strained his eyes through the dim starlight, seeking for any sign of the approaching enemy. He had not very long to wait. Soon he could discern a dark mass creeping along the edge of the ravine, whose object evidently was to get round his left flank before attacking it. Similarly, although Fleming was not aware of it, did Byng discover a small column of the enemy attempting to steal round his right flank. Byng had very little doubt that Hugh was equally menaced on the left. Directing his men to use their rifles, as he expected he was immediately answered from the left. Finding themselves discovered, the Russians raised their battle slogan, only to be answered by the defiant hurrahs of the English. Then ensued some twenty minutes of as stubborn fighting as it is possible to witness. True to his promise the Colonel had been prompt with his reinforcements, or else the —th must have been swept out of the position they had won. Twice were the Russians hurled back from their desperate assault, but their gallant leader succeeded in rallying them for even a third attempt. But the steel had been taken out of them, and they came on in a very half-hearted way to what they had done on the two previous occasions. Though victorious, the —th had been pretty roughly handled in this last struggle, and not only were many of them stretched lifeless in the trench, but the stretchers had a busy time in conveying the

wounded to the rear. Among them were two of Hugh's brother subalterns, one of whom was carried off with a smashed arm, and the other a bullet through his thigh, which, when attended to, proved to disqualify him for military service for ever. The Colonel reinforced Byng's party to the extent the position would hold. Once more he impressed upon him that he must hold the position, *coûte que coûte*, and that he might thoroughly depend upon reinforcements, led by himself, to come to his assistance the minute he was seen to be attacked.

"Till the moon rises," said the chief, "you'll have a ticklish time of it, but as soon as it's light enough, the batteries will make it rather hot for the Russians, should they venture to cross that open ground."

There was little need to tell the trench sentries to keep watch that night. Little more than an hour elapsed before the enemy once more sallied forth from their lines, and made another most determined attack. If the conflict was not so long as the previous one, it was quite as obstinate, and in the course of it Colonel Croker, while personally leading the reinforcements, fell literally riddled with bullets, while another subaltern of the hard beset—th, was carried away very badly wounded. Twice more at short intervals did the Russians again return to the attack, and in the last of these a bullet stretched Tom Byng, to all appearances, lifeless on the ground, and, the struggle ended, one of

the few remaining sergeants reported to Hugh Fleming that two-thirds of the men were down, and that he, Mr. Fleming, was the sole officer left of the half-dozen officers of the regiment that had marched down from camp.

Black with powder, with clothes torn to ribbons, and eyes bloodshot with the thirst to slay, they were a fierce and savage-looking band upon whom the moon now looked down. It was not likely Fleming thought that any further attack would be made upon them, but for all that he knew he had to keep vigilant watch until relieved. He was in sole charge of the shattered remnant of the —th. Poor Tom Byng; he never thought of his falling. And then he thought savagely of Miss Smerdon's sarcastic speech.

"The bill," he muttered angrily, "the bill ought to satisfy her. Five down out of six is pretty stiff. And we have not quite done with it yet. They will never be able to say that the —th is not a fighting regiment after this. They must put some account of such a scrimmage as this in the papers. It's a big thing in sortics. I wonder whether Nell will be pleased when she reads it." And here suddenly through the trench ran a whisper of, "Here they come again."

In his anxiety to ascertain what was doing, Hugh Fleming sprang upon the slight parapet, an act which was immediately greeted by a report of two or three rifles, the bullets of which sang past un-

pleasantly close to his ears. He jumped back again into the trench, but not before he had convinced himself that so far the alarm was baseless. Some few Russian sharp-shooters had crept along the edge of the ravine, with a view of harassing the occupants of their late position, but there were apparently no supports behind them.

The moon died gradually away before the first streaks of dawn, and no sooner was the light sufficient than the batteries on both sides engaged in a savage snarl over the disputed bone of last night. The Russians knew well that every hour their lost position remained in the hands of their assailants so much the more difficult would it be to recover. It was clear it could only be retaken by daylight at a great sacrifice. They must wait for the next night, and in the meantime, as Mr. Flinn said, "They were showing a deal of nasty temper."

It was weary work, after the prolonged excitement of the night, waiting through the early morning hours for the reliefs to come down ; but they came at last, and sadly Hugh Fleming commenced to lead his worn and shattered band back to camp. It was impossible to regain the right attack without exposing the party to a certain amount of fire from the enemy's guns, and the Russians were not the men to overlook their opportunity. However, Fleming was fortunate enough to accomplish this without further casual-

ties, and finally reached camp, where he found the remainder of the regiment anxiously awaiting their coming, and full of pride at the way they had taken and held the Quarries.

On the right, our gallant Allies had undergone similar experiences, but the splendid rush with which they had taken the Mamelon just before sunset, recalling the dash of a pack of hounds into cover, had not been sustained. Carried away by their impetuosity the victorious French chased their beaten foes to the very glacis of the Malakoff, but there they encountered the Russian reserves, and were in their turn not only hunted back to the Mamelon, but through it, and so lost the work they had so gallantly won. General Bosquet, who was in charge of the attack, was, however, not quite the man to put up with such failure as this. He hurled two brigades at once against the re-captured Mamelon, and after a brief but sanguinary struggle the French regained possession of the Lunette, though, take it all in all, at a fearful sacrifice of life.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS SMERDON'S PRIDE BREAKS DOWN.

A WELL-KNOWN novelist, who has not long since left us, ascribed the rather moderate success of one of his earlier stories to the Crimean war. It was the first time we had been engaged in a European

struggle of this sort, since the invention of steam, telegraphs, and, if I may be pardoned the expression, newspaper correspondents. Then again the great battle between Russia and the Allies was practically fought out in a cock-pit, and the famous correspondent of the *Times*, then in the hey-day of his youth, was enabled to keep that paper supplied with such an accurate, I may almost say microscopic, account of the great siege as made it easy for those at home to follow it, in all its details. It might have been headed, after the manner of these times, "The Crimea day by day." It was close upon a twelvemonth from the time the Western powers first sat down in front of the place, before the Muscovite, after gloriously half-repulsing an assault all along the line, succumbed to his assailants. Small wonder that those who were there from first to last compared it to the siege of Troy. One thing it proved conclusively, and that was that like Sebastopol, Troy was only half invested, or starvation must have compelled its capitulation long before ten years.

That several of his brother officers should gather round Hugh, on his arrival in camp, was but natural. They were all anxious to hear his account of the last night's fighting, how poor Grogan came by his death, and so on.

"No doubt you are pretty well played out, old man, but beyond that you took the Quarries with a rush, and have been fighting for them all night we

know nothing ; whether the wounded fellows could tell us anything we don't know ; the doctor won't allow them to talk just yet, he is so afraid of fever. Byng might no doubt if they'd let him."

"Tom Byng !" ejaculated Fleming. "Why he's dead. Shot through the head."

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed two or three voices at once.

"Why I saw him carried away myself."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the others. "It was a mighty close shave, but Tom Byng is no more dead than you are. He was stunned and was a good bit coming to, but he has escaped, the doctor says, by about an eighth of an inch."

"Thank God," said Fleming. "I'm sure I thought he was killed. How about the others?"

"Badly wounded all three of them, still the doctor says if he can only keep the fever within bounds they will all pull through. Poor Loyce must lose his arm. You're not touched, Hugh, are you?"

"No, but I'll tell you what. I'm just froze for a drink, a wash, and a sleep."

"All right, old man, we'll bother you no more. Bustle off to your tent and we'll see nobody disturbs you. We were all turned out and kept under arms for two or three hours in case you wanted us down there," and the speaker jerked his thumb in the direction of Sebastopol.

After the excitement and fatigue of the night

Fleming slept soundly for some hours. He had rapidly adopted the habits of the old campaigner, who thoroughly understands that sleep is a thing to take when you can get it. It sometimes happened that men only came out of the trenches to be marched back again before they could get their belts off, in consequence of a sudden alarm. The contending armies were like two gladiators ever keeping a keen eye for an opening, and, notably, on the side of the Russians, taking speedy advantage of it. He was awakened by a roar of laughter just outside his tent, and hastily putting on a few things and a pair of slippers, stepped outside and found a small knot of his brother officers gathered round Tom Byng, who, seated in an easy chair, with a bandaged head, and propped up by pillows, had apparently finished the narration of some story which had thoroughly tickled his audience. He silently extended his hand to Fleming as he came forward, and as Hugh clasped it, he said: "Thank God! I was afraid it was all over with you."

Byng gave a queer smile, and rejoined with a slight motion of his head:

"Natural density saved me, old fellow. I'm all right, but have rather an earthquaky feeling to-day."

"What's the joke?" continued Fleming, as he warmly pressed his friend's hand. "I was roused from my slumbers by ribald laughter."

"Tell him, some of you," said Byng.

"Well, it's all Mickey Flinn. Seeing Tom outside his tent he came across to congratulate his Captain for not being kilt dead entirely, and Tom was unwise enough to chaff him.

"'Last night was worse than the Woronzoff, eh, Flinn?' said Tom.

"'Deed sorr, and it was, and it's glad I am to see your honour about again, for it's kilt dead entirely I feared you was when I put you on the stretcher.'

"'Ah, being shot through the head is worse than being shot through the body.'

"'Deed, I don't know, sorr, it's much of a muchness it sthrikes me, only you get the credit of being wounded for the wan and you don't for the other,' and with that Mickey Flinn saluted, and stalked back to his company in supreme dudgeon."

"It's all the old villain came to see me about," said Byng, still laughing at the recollection. "I believe he was glad I wasn't killed; but he's very angry because I have been returned as wounded, and he wasn't."

"Yes," laughed the adjutant, who was one of the group; "that's a good healthy grievance that ought to be a comfort to Flinn, whenever the rations run short, to the end of the campaign. He's a fine old soldier, but as we all know you may trust the old soldier to have his grievance."

"Yes," said Fleming, "he'll go through any amount of hardship, hard work, and fighting; but

he must have his grievance—generally about the veriest trifle.”

And then there suddenly arose a shout from the orderly room tent of “Mail in from England!” followed by the sharp bugle-call for orderly sergeants, and the group of officers, with Fleming amongst them, rushed off to see after their letters.

“Yes,” thought Torn Byng, as he looked after Fleming; “I counselled him not to speak, but he has the best of it now. Letters from home! Yes, we’re all glad to get them—ah, very glad no doubt, most of us; but don’t tell me Hugh wouldn’t give up all his letters from home, and the whole correspondence of the regiment to boot, for that one letter he’s expecting from Nell Lynden! I hope the young un ’ll come through all safe; and after last night it does seem as if Providence was watching especially over him. I fancy he was right not to take my advice.” And if one might judge from Hugh’s face as he passed a few minutes later with an open letter in his hand, Byng was right in his conclusion.

Few things could have been more harassing to a romantic and imaginative young woman of those days than to discover that she had let her heart go out of her keeping before she was aware of it, to be uncertain whether her feelings were reciprocated or not, and that the man who had won her affections should sail for the East without making any avowal was hard.

Frances Smerdon was in this position, and all Nell Lynden's burst of girlish confidences about her love dream were gall and wormwood to her friend. "Detestable gush," Frances Smerdon called it, and revenged herself by saying the most spiteful thing of the Regiment collectively, which were intended to be repeated for the benefit of the one individual who was the object of both her love and her hate. But, when, with the Springtime, came the news that the fighting had begun again, and also that the Regiment had reached the Crimea, Frances Smerdon's heart began to quail and soften. She could not speak bitterly of men she had known well but such a short time ago, and the finish of whose lives she might see announced in any morning paper. There was one man she hated, there was one man she declared she would never speak to again. He could not have been blind to her love. He must have despised it, she would never, never, never——and then this inconsistent young lady would burst into a flood of tears, and only wish she could write a long letter to him.

"If he had only given me some excuse before he left," she moaned, "but I suppose even if he was seriously wounded it would be an awful thing for me to write to him. As for Nell, I could box her ears, I could, for gushing to me about her love when she knows I'm so unhappy.

Now this was exactly what Miss Lynden did not know. Her own love affair had probably

prevented her noticing her friend's weakness, though women seldom succeed in keeping each other in the dark on such points. Men as a rule are slow to recognize a leaning in their favour. It might be that, but, whether from policy or from a mistaken estimate of his chances, Tom Byng sailed for the East without uttering a word to Frances Smerdon that could be construed into anything more than admiration. But what did puzzle Miss Lynden much was the change that had come over her friend. It was the one girlish friendship, remember, she had ever made, and that Frances should not sympathise and rejoice with her in the flood-tide of her first love grieved the girl sorely. She so craved for a woman's sympathy in her passionate dream—for someone to talk with of her hopes, of her fears—and women had too many of those latter to battle with in love born in such troublous times.

She could not understand it—Frances seemed to have changed completely. She was witty and sarcastic about things generally; she had laughed at Nell about her "spoonishness"; told her she could not hope to keep her soldier wrapped in cotton wool when shot and shell were flying about; and that she needn't be afraid, it was a peaceful regiment, and all would be over before they got there. Angry though they made her, Nell felt that there was a hardness and bitterness in Frances' letters that had no genuine ring in it; and

then, much to her amazement, Miss Smerdon's letters suddenly completed altered in tone, and her enquiries after the —th became both courteous and pressing.

As we know, whether the man she loves is in danger, or whether he is merely passing a lively winter in a pleasant place, make a good deal of difference in the expression of a woman's sentiments under Miss Smerdon's peculiar circumstances.

The camp was rich in "shaves" that bright spring weather. Men seem to have shaken off the torpidity of the winter, both mentally and bodily, and, wondrous were the rumours of what the French were doing, and we were going to do, and even what the Russians might be expected to do. Men began to move about amongst the lines, and the half-starved garrons of ponies, that had passed the winter in painfully toiling with such luxuries as their masters could lay hold of between Balaklava and the front, waxed fat in the ribs and sleek in the coat. Barley was plentiful, and they no longer stood shivering at their picket pegs, with their quarters turned to the cold blasts of the Steppes. Enterprising sutlers erected stores on the way to the front, and sweet champagne, dubious brandy, and all descriptions of tinned delicacies became no longer scarce, and were to be had on comparatively reasonable terms.

A few days after the taking of the Quarries a

group of officers might have been seen lounging on the Woronzoff road just at the point where three or four tracks—it would have been absurd to describe them as anything more—branched off the main road in various directions across the Plateau, sufficiently confusing, except to the initiated. Take the one to the right for instance, and an hour or two's easy riding would bring you amongst the famous caves of Inkermann, and eventuate in your certainly getting inside Sebastopol before morning, as a prisoner. The laughing knot of officers were of all branches of the service, but there were a good many of the —th among them. A fresh regiment had arrived at Balaklava that morning and was to march up to the front that afternoon.

Now the regiment in question was what is termed a sister corps of the —th, which being interpreted means that the two corps had been quartered together, or as the soldiers term it, "lain together" in several places, and that the officers and men had cordially fraternised and knew each other well. The men, as a rule, showed their gratification at the meeting by being slightly the worse for liquor, late for tattoo, and exchanging forage caps, than which latter mysterious ceremony none are so significant of friendship and goodwill in the eyes of the British soldier. The officers usually celebrated their re-union by an interchange of dinners, in which they would sing the old songs, and prolong the festivities far into the night.

Moreover, as it was known that the same regiment had a draft of the —th attached to it, the latter had sent their drums and fifes to meet the new-comers at this point in the road, and from thence play them into camp.

“Not much of a band you know,” said Hugh Fleming, “all we can say is, it’s the best we have out here. Hang it, I never properly appreciated a drum and fife before.”

“Yes, you’re right,” exclaimed the adjutant, “a little music does brighten one up here a good deal. On my word I wouldn’t despise a decent barrel organ.”

“That’s where the French have one pull over us,” said an officer of artillery, “they managed to bring their bands out with them. By the way, I was down in your conquest last night, Fleming.”

“My conquest, indeed !” laughed Hugh, “I was uncommon glad to get out of it, that’s all I know. I hope you didn’t find the Russians quite so touchy about it as I did.”

“No, they’re quiet enough over it now ; we should like to get guns into it, but the ground’s so confoundedly rocky I can’t see how the engineers are ever to make the sap.”

“Listen,” cried the adjutant, “here they come, and playing our own quick step, “Warwickshire Lads,” as a greeting. Now fall in, you drums and fifes, and as soon as you catch sight of the head of the regiment strike up their own march, “Hurrah

for the Bonnets of Blue," and, confound you, roll it out as if you were trying to crack the fifes and burst the sheepskins."

Another minute and the head of the new regiment appeared in sight, and then the drummers and fifers of the —th crashed out their welcome to the new-comers whose own music at once ceased. Cordial hand-grips and enquiries passed amongst the officers of the two corps, for it was not two months ago since the new-comers had played the —th down the Stairs at Valetta. At this point the draft of the —th branched off to the left, in the direction of the lines of their own corps, and with them rode the adjutant and Hugh Fleming. On their arrival this batch of only just drilled recruits was at once paraded and the men told off to their respective companies.

Hugh Fleming looked carelessly on while the adjutant allotted a few to his own company. The sergeant was marching these off when the sound of his own name made him turn abruptly.

"Here's one recruit, sir," said the sergeant, "says he's got a bit of a note for you."

"A note for me!" ejaculated Hugh. "How did you get it, and what's your name, my lad?"

"Peter Phybbs, sir," replied the boy. He was little more than eighteen. "My sister got it for me when she heard what regiment I'd 'listed in, and said I was to be sure and give it to you as soon as I had the chance."

Hugh threw one glance at the superscription of the rather crumpled missive the recruit had placed in his hands, and instantly recognised Nell Lynden's well-known writing. He at once tore it open.

"DEAREST HUGH," it ran, "the young brother of Phybbs, our parlour-maid, has it seems enlisted in your regiment. The girl's in a sad taking about it, in which, alas, I can only too fully sympathise with her. She seems to think, poor thing, that your powers to protect him out there are boundless, and to soothe her I write this to ask you to look after him a bit if he gets sick or in trouble. I know you will, Hugh, dear, if it's only for my sake ; but I also like to think that it is another link between us ; that while his sister is watching and waiting by my side here, he is fighting by your side there. I have never seen him, but he sounds a mere boy to be sent out on such work. God bless and save you, my darling,

"Ever your own,

"NELL."

"Well, Phybbs," said Hugh. "I'm asked to look after you a bit, and you may thoroughly depend upon me as long as you deserve it. Keep straight, my lad, don't flinch from your work, and be easy with the drink, and that's all I have to say to you at present. See the old hands aren't too

hard on him, Smithers," and with that Hugh turned on his heel and walked off to his tent.

"A queer letter of introduction," he said to himself with a smile, "but I must do the best I can for Nell's *protégé*, simply because he is her *protégé*." He little thought those few lines of recommendation were to prove of more value to him ere long than any letter to the Commander-in-Chief from the highest in the land could be.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS FROM THE CRIMEA.

MISS SMERDON has been making herself as unpleasant as it is possible for a vivacious young lady to do when matters are running askew with her, and that, needless to say, means that Twmbarlyn House is rendered generally uncomfortable for all therein.

"What's come to the girl?" demanded Mr. Smerdon, petulantly, of his wife. "She used to be the life and sunshine of the place, and now she just mopes and snaps like a puppy with the distemper."

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Smerdon, anxiously; "she won't tell me, but there's something that worries and frets her. She's never been the same girl since her last visit to Manchester."

The good lady did not think fit to confide her thoughts to her husband, but she was not blinded; she strongly suspected that her daughter had

brought a heartache home with her. The very servants wondered what had come to Miss Frances, and said that there really was no pleasing her.

One morning, Miss Smerdon hastily caught up the paper, as she usually did; she was feverishly anxious to see it now-a-days, though formerly the perusal of the *Times* had been either neglected or left for an idle half-hour. She was so interested, she said, in the doings of our soldiers in the Crimea. All this, though unnoticed by her father, was easy reading for a mother's eye. She could not induce the girl to give her her confidence, but Mrs. Smerdon had little doubt that Frances' heart was in a soldier's keeping. If she had thought that before, she knew it for certain that morning. No sooner had the girl torn open the paper than the head lines, "Brilliant Exploit; the Taking of the Quarries; Severe Fighting," caught her eye, and then came a glowing and graphic description of the position, of the dashing manner in which it had been carried, followed by a spirit-stirring narrative of the gallant and obstinate endeavours of the Russians to recapture it during the night, and speaking in terms of unqualified praise of the bulldog tenacity with which the —th clung to the vantage ground they had won.

Frances' colour came and went as she read; at length she came to the postscript of all glorious bulletins.

“We regret to say that in the execution of this brilliant operation Her Majesty’s —th suffered severely, having no less than five out of the six officers engaged in it *hors de combat*. The sub-joined list is a return of the killed and wounded on the occasion.

“Killed:—Lieut.-Colonel Croker (commanding the attack); Captain Grogan, —th Regiment.

“Wounded:—Captain Byng, —th Regiment (severely).”

The paper dropped from her hand and the blood left her cheeks. Frances turned white to her very lips, and a slight moan escaped her. Her head swam, and it was only by a supreme effort she saved herself from fainting. Her mother was by her side in an instant, while her father looked up from his letters with open-eyed astonishment, and exclaimed, “Good Heavens, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing, Matthew; don’t take any notice of her; she will be all right directly,” rejoined his wife, sharply. “She’s only a little faint; she has been out of sorts lately, you know.”

“I think, mamma, I’ll go and lie down; I don’t feel very well,” murmured Frances, and assisted by her mother she left the room and made her way to her own bed-chamber. Arrived there, she broke fairly down, burst into tears, and sobbed like a child on her mother’s breast.

Mrs. Smerdon knew that this was no time for questioning. She let the girl weep passionately on her bosom for some minutes, knowing full well that she would have all her confidence a little later. Then she loosened her dress, made her lie down on the bed, and said :

“ You can’t sleep, I know, Frances ; but try and lie quiet, dear, for half-an-hour. I will come back and bring you some tea then, and you shall tell me all your trouble. Who should you come to, child, in your sorrow save to the mother who bore you ? ”

And before an hour was over Mrs. Smerdon knew that her daughter had given her heart away unwooed, and was tortured with shame and anguish because it was so, and that the author of all this mischief was now lying in grievous case in camp before Sebastopol.

We know that Tom Byng was in no such plight, but he had been carried away from the Quarries for dead in the first instance, and had actually figured as such in the first returns of casualties. Luckily, the mistake was discovered in time, and “ severely wounded ” was substituted for killed. Sanguine though the doctors were about his hurt being of no great consequence, yet they were a little chary of speaking decisively about it for a few days, and hesitated to describe as “ slightly ” a wound which might even yet take a serious turn.

It might have been some satisfaction to Mickey

Flinn had he understood that Captain Byng had no knowledge of how he was returned in that night's casualties.

"Severely wounded!" thought Frances, when left to herself. Ah! how often had that word been the precursor of "died of his wounds," of late. She had heard it said that the wretched accommodation of the field hospitals gave little chance of recovery to those once admitted into them. Oh, if she could but go out to nurse him! But that was impossible. If she could but write to him. But no, he had never spoken—he had given her no right to do that. And yet in her heart of hearts she believed that he loved her. Oh, she had been mad! She had been rightly punished! She had jeered at the regiment—sneered at him; and no doubt Nell had told Hugh Fleming, as she intended Nell should, and so all her bitter words had come round to his ears. How could she have been so wicked and so spiteful? How was he to ever know that such words escaped her lips in the agony of what she believed to be her rejected love.

No, she thought, she must go away. She could not stay at Twmbarlyn, for everybody, she felt sure, would read her secret in her face. She would go to the Lyndens. She hungered to hear all about the old lot, to talk of Hugh Fleming, of Tom; and her face flushed even as her lips syllabled the name. She would hear, too, what his hurt was, whether it was likely to go very hard

with him—no, if Nellie would have her she would go to Manchester at once. She would write by that day's post, and then the return of her mother cut short the thread of her meditations.

As she had anticipated, Mrs. Smerdon found herself speedily taken into her daughter's confidence, and she not only soothed the girl, but proceeded, metaphorically, to bind up her wounds forthwith. The Smerdons were good, homely, as well as self-made, people, and neither of them entertained any extreme ambitions for either their sons or daughter. Smerdon had attained wealth, and with it such ascent in social status as is its inevitable accompaniment. So long as Frances married a gentleman of fair repute she was free to choose where she listed, and Mrs. Smerdon knew very well that had any of the officers from Newport, who so constantly dined with them, taken the girl's fancy, her father would have made no objection. As for Captain Byng, he had always been a great favourite with the good lady, although she had never dreamed that he had found favour in her daughter's eyes. But this may very easily be accounted for. Though Frances had always liked Captain Byng, it was not till she was staying at Manchester with the Lyndens that the liking had ripened into a serious attachment. There is love at first sight, no doubt, but it's more generally, I fancy, of a slower growth. Again, as Tom had observed, soldiers were "up in the market" just

then ; and on my conscience I believe people fall in love very often for the sole reason that they ought not to do so.

Mrs. Smerdon comforted the girl very much. She made light of the difficulties of the situation. "If," she thought, "Frances has set her heart on Captain Byng, and he likes her, there is no earthly reason why she shouldn't marry him—let him only get safely through this horrid war—and he will make her a very suitable husband." In her mother's partiality she looked upon Frances as a good match for any man. No, she saw no reason whatever why Frances shouldn't write to Captain Byng.

"You knew him very well, and there's nothing out of the way in your writing to inquire after him, having seen his mishap in the papers. Still, if you wish it, which you don't——" and the elder lady laughed merrily,

"Thanks, no, mamma ; I'll write to him myself."

"Quite so," replied Mrs. Smerdon, nodding. "And now, my dear, hope for the best ; it's no use thinking that just because people are ill they are never going to get over it. As for your going up to stay with Nellie, I certainly think that's advisable. Change will do you good. You will have an inexhaustible topic between you, and she will be able to give you small details about their daily lives out there, interesting to anyone, but

especially to those who know—much more care for—the actors in the drama.” Frances’ face flushed a little at her mother’s allusion to her weakness, but she had derived much consolation from her counsel and sympathy, and the thought that she saw no cause why she should not write to Captain Byng. In the course of that afternoon she despatched a letter to Miss Lynden, in which she recanted all the bitter things she had ever said about the regiment, called herself a little beast for having even thought such things, pleaded that she was very miserable, begged that she might come to her, said she had so much to say to her, and pledged herself to be on her very best behaviour during her visit. If Miss Lynden had been blind to Frances’ feelings in the first instance, she could read between the lines of her present letter, thanks to Hugh Fleming. Tom Byng was a very transparent man, and, sharpened perhaps by his own experiences, Hugh had no difficulty in penetrating his friend’s secret, before they had set foot in the Crimea.

When they’d got this town taken and the war finished up, he thought his friend would have no cause for despair if he asked the momentous question. Meanwhile the town took a deal of taking, and seemed quite as well supplied with provisions and munitions of war as its assailants.

Miss Lynden’s answer came by return of post. Thanks to Hugh’s hints she was now able to

account for the fluctuations in Frances' correspondence which had so much puzzled her. She knew very well what that long talk would be about, and it was very sweet to the girl to think that at last she would have someone with whom she might talk unrestrainedly about her love.

As far as the doings in the Crimea went, no man could follow the proceedings of the Allies with closer interest than Dr. Lynden. But though aware of the engagement between Fleming and his daughter, he totally eschewed all discussion of that subject. He had some grounds for doing so ; it certainly could not be said that Hugh's family had welcomed the intelligence with effusion. To tell the truth, old Mr. Fleming was furious at the announcement, and only restrained from fulminating his wrath in all directions by the circumstances of the case. "Nothing can take place at present between them but an exchange of ridiculous love-letters ; Time very often dispels these illusions. Besides, if anything should happen to the boy, I should be very sorry to think that angry words had passed between us ; and Master Hugh has a considerable touch of my temper about him. If he persists in his obstinacy and folly, when this affair is all over it will be quite time to let him know my mind thoroughly about such a preposterous arrangement." And then with sundry incoherent remarks, in which "young idiot," "retired doctors of unknown families," "im-

pertinence," and strong expletives were all mixed together, Mr. Fleming senior determined to say no more on the subject at present, but to fall back on a policy much in vogue just then of "masterly inactivity."

"Oh, Nell! can you forgive me?" said Frances, when, her journey accomplished, she found herself once more safe in the Lyndens' drawing-room, with her friend ministering to her requirements in the shape of tea. "I've said horrid things of Hugh and the dear old regiment, I know. I could bite my tongue out for doing so now; but I was so miserable. I have tried so hard to forget him, but I can't; and now he's wounded—badly wounded—but I forgot, you don't know, and, oh, how am I to tell you?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," replied Nell, with a smile, "I fancy I do know—know perhaps even more than you do, and a pretty scolding there will be for Captain Byng next time we meet."

"Is it very serious?" asked Frances, eagerly. "How is he going on? Do they think he will get over it? What does Hugh say?"

"Hush! one question at a time," rejoined Miss Lynden. "We must wait for the next mail to come in. I had only one line from Hugh this time. Here it is," and the girl took the scrap of a letter from the bosom of her dress, and read as follows:

"MY DARLING NELL,—Just one line to say that I am all right ; but we had a big fight last night in the trenches, and you will be sorry to hear that several of your old acquaintances were knocked over. Poor Grogan, indeed, killed. I'm so dead beat I can't write any more."

"Ever dearest, your own HUGH.

"That is all, Frances, so you see we must wait till the next mail for further tidings. I'm sure to hear again then. Hugh is very good about writing, though sometimes I get only such a scrap as this.

"It's terrible, this watching and waiting," cried Miss Smerdon. "It must be hard for you to bear ; but, ah ! Nell, how much happier you are than me. What wouldn't I give for just two lines like that !" and as she spoke she looked wistfully at the letter her friend held between her fingers. "Ah, if he had only given me the right to care for him."

"Listen, Frances," replied Miss Lynden, "didn't I tell you that I had something to scold Captain Byng for. If his advice had been followed I should have been exactly in your place, and Hugh would not have told his love before he left. You're a proud girl, and Captain Byng's a quixotic man, as if a man's love story ever offended a woman, even when she didn't care for him,"

"Ah, my pride is all broken down now," replied Miss Smerdon, in dejected tones. "He must never

know it, he would laugh at me very probably if he did. It's very disgraceful, Nell, but I do love him. You never told Hugh any of my wicked remarks, did you?"

"Well, do you know," faltered Miss Lynden, "do you know, I'm afraid I did."

"Oh, Nellie, how cruel of you. How could you," exclaimed Miss Smerdon with flushed cheeks, starting bolt upright from the desponding attitude she had assumed in a corner of the sofa, "you know I never meant them."

"I knew they were meant more for somebody else's ears than mine," remarked the other demurely, "and I took care they got there."

"How mean of you, how wicked of you, what a wretch Tom—Captain Byng I mean—must think me; and now he's dying——" and Miss Smerdon sobbed audibly.

"Don't be a fool, Frances," interposed Miss Lynden, a little sharply. "I quoted your tart remarks in my letters to Hugh simply because the fluctuations of your temper puzzled me. I could not understand it. It was well I did so or I should not have understood things even now. Hugh, you see, was behind the scenes the other side, and when we compared notes we came to the conclusion that Benedick had gone to the wars once more, and that Beatrice had promised to eat all of his killing. My dear, when next you meet Captain Byng, I have no doubt you'll find he has something to say to you."

“ Oh, Nell, do you really think so? Do you think he——”

“ Loves you !” said Miss Lynden, laughing. “ No, I don’t ; but Hugh does, and that’s a good deal more to the purpose. He’s wiser than I am, and has much better opportunities than mine of judging of Captain Byng’s feelings. *Soyez tranquille*, my dear, and wait and hope trustfully for good tidings by the next mail.”

Oh, the humility and self-deception of a great love ! Here is quick, clever Nellie Lynden not only saying that honest, straightforward Hugh Fleming is wiser than she, but that he possesses a quicker insight into the state of the affections ! As if on this latter point the perceptions of man are not as those of the mole compared to the eagle with the observations of the opposite sex.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSTABLE TARRANT IS PUZZLED.

POLICE CONSTABLE Richard Tarrant is somewhat disconcerted at having, as yet, failed to verify his conclusions. He had drawn a more prosaic deduction than Miss Smerdon, concerning the mysterious employment practised by Dr. Lynden in his den. When on duty, his beat often brought him within the vicinity of the doctor’s house ; but he spent many a sleepless night, which his obligations to the force did not impose upon him, in watching

that side door of the doctor's. We know what he supposed that the rather retiring portal would open to admit ; but with all his vigilance, he was fain to acknowledge that, watch as he might, he saw bodies, neither living nor dead, pass its threshold. Had he confided his suspicions to Polly Phybbs, that young lady, after she had got over the first shock of such an accusation against the doctor, would have ridiculed the bare idea of such a thing. What the doctor might do in the laboratory she did not know, but she would have been quite certain that it could be nothing of the kind that Dick Tarrant suspected ; and still more certain that if there had been the faintest grounds for thinking such a thing, nothing would ever have induced her to enter the room again. She had obeyed her cousin's command to keep her eye upon the doctor ; she had always done as Dick told her, and yet even about that she had her compunctions, and only for that foolish belief she had in Dick's understanding, would have pronounced that all nonsense. That so far it had led to nothing, she was well satisfied. The doctor was a kind master, to whom she wished no harm, if, as Dick said, he was engaged in something " agen the law," well, then, she supposed he deserved to be punished, but she did not wish hers should be the hand to bring it about. Her young mistress too, she held in the highest esteem, and then had she not just written that letter to Mr. Fleming in the Crimea ? and Polly

Phybbs looked upon the ægis of Hugh Fleming's protection as going far to ensure the safety of her boyish brother. Still, she never had refused to do Dick's bidding, and she would do it now, but it was much satisfaction to her to find that nothing came of it. What had induced the doctor to make that mysterious addition to his house? It would have hardly attracted the curiosity of anyone but such an addle-headed man as Dick Tarrant. His main idea was that advancement in the police was easiest procured by some startling discovery of crime. More than one had taken place since he had been in the force, but Dick argued that he never had any luck, let him only get a chance and they would see what was in him. His superiors believed there was very little, and were not at all likely to entrust Constable Tarrant with any delicate investigation. A slow thinker, one to whom ideas came but seldom, Dick clung strongly to this main belief of his, and also to that subsidiary notion that the conviction of the doctor was the case by which he was destined to achieve greatness. Now, without the slightest disparagement of the police, because it is an infirmity of human nature, there is always a disposition to make evidence chime in with conviction. Once having settled in our mind who is the author of a murder, we are more disposed to devote our powers to proving ourselves right in that conjecture than to an un-biassed investigation into who really committed it.

The faculty of cool judicial analysis is rare, and it is seldom even the best detective can resist jumping to a conclusion at which he should only have arrived step by step.

That Richard Tarrant is also obstinate, it is almost needless to state. Men of this type always are. Let them once get a maggot into their head, and they cling to it with a pertinacity that would be beyond all praise if it were not wrongheadedness—mainly owing, I fancy, for want of another idea to take its place. Dick Tarrant is in this plight. He began by suspecting Doctor Lynden of vague offences, and must continue to do so because he has no one else to suspect.

It is Sunday afternoon, and, in the worst possible humour, Mr. Tarrant is lounging about the road awaiting the advent of Miss Phybbs. He is angry that his vigilance has resulted in nothing so far. Mr. Tarrant is an indolent man, and chafes mightily at nights out of bed, which produce no compensating result. That he should have been kept waiting is an additional grievance; and moreover, he has discovered that Polly is reluctant to carry out his orders—in fact, to use his own expression, that she isn't half "keeping an eye on him."

"Now," mutters Mr. Tarrant to himself, "I ain't going to stand that, not likely you know. Never give women their heads; that's my motto. And if Polly thinks she's not to keep her nose to the

grindstone, she's very much mistaken. There's my future career all depending upon the successful working out of this riddle, and she thinks she ain't called on to assist. If she thinks after we are married she'll have nothing to do but sit with her hands in her lap and play at being a fine lady, she won't do for me. A man can't do everything himself, and my wife will have to help keep the pot boiling."

God help poor Polly Phybbs if she should come to wed this man under that delusion. He is of that sort for whom women of Polly's class work their fingers to the bone, quite content to keep their lords in indolence as long as they neither ill-use nor or are false to them.

Suddenly the side door of the doctor's house opened, that door which, watch it as he might, he had never succeeded in seeing used by anyone. And out of it to the utter bewilderment of Constable Tarrant, stepped a well, but quietly-dressed, lady-like woman. Although closely veiled, he felt sure that it was not Miss Lynden; he knew the latter perfectly by sight. The doctor's visitor was both taller and stouter, in short, much more of a woman, and her unexpected appearance so utterly upset his previous suspicions concerning the doctor that he neglected to do what an ordinarily intelligent officer would have done under the circumstances, to wit, follow her.

She apparently did not notice him, but walked

quickly towards the busy part of the town, while Dick first stared vacantly at her, and then looked in a dazed way at the portal from which she had emerged. He was still gazing at this last, when he was startled by a voice at his elbow, saying :

“You seem rather interested in that door, my man ; pray, what is it you see to admire in it ?”

He turned, and to his surprise found the doctor standing by his side.

“How on earth did he come here ?” was Dick’s first thought, utterly oblivious of the fact that it was easy for the doctor to come out of one door while his (Tarrant’s) eyes were fixed on the other.

“Nothing, sir, nothing !” he replied, confusedly. “I was only just thinking——”

“Of what ?” said the doctor, suavely.

“Thinking, sir, thinking—just thinking—about nothing at all,” concluded Dick, desperately, disconcerted by the keen glance with which the doctor regarded him.

“An occupation in which mankind spend a good deal of their time,” said the doctor, with a slightly sarcastic smile. “I wish you a good afternoon !” and he walked leisurely away in the same direction as that taken by the lady.

“Well, I’m blowed !” remarked Mr. Tarrant, after a minute or two. “Here’s a discovery ? This is what comes of keeping your eye on them.” And here his reflections were interrupted by the appearance of Miss Phybbs.

"Now, Polly," he exclaimed, after they had shaken hands, "you're a nice one, you are, to help an intelligent officer in the discharge of his duties. Who's that lady who visits the doctor, and he lets out of the side door? You've never said anything about her, you know."

"Lady! What lady? The only ladies that come to our house come to visit Miss Lynden, and of course, come and go at the proper door."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Tarrant, sarcastically; "this is what you call keeping an eye on him, is it? If you ain't got no powers of observation, you can't help it. If you can't see beyond the end of your nose, I'm sorry for you; but if you ain't altogether a beetle, it's downright wicked idleness, that's what it is."

"Oh, Dick, Dick! what have I done?" cried the girl.

"Done," replied the police-constable in high dudgeon, "it's what you ain't done I'm complaining of. How do you think I'm ever going to get on in my profession if you won't help?"

"I assure you, Dick, I've done as you ordered me, but I've nothing to tell you. The doctor locks himself into the laboratory as usual, and I haven't been called in to tidy it up for a good three weeks. He's never had a lady, nor any other visitor to my knowledge all the time. Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"Mistaken! not likely," he replied, "I suppose

you was born without gumption, and it can't be helped, but just you attend to me." And then Mr Tarrant proceeded to relate circumstantially how he had seen the lady come out of the side door, how her departure had been closely followed by the unexpected appearance of the doctor at his elbow, and how the latter had then walked off in the same direction.

If Miss Phybbs had been a very faint-hearted coadjutor so far, in the detective business, yet she promised to be a very valuable assistant in the future. She wished no harm to the doctor and his family, but her womanly curiosity was now thoroughly piqued. There was a slight flavour of scandal about Dick's story which was very titillating, her enquiries concerning the lady's dress were far more minute than her cousin was able to satisfy; and if Dick recognised that his theory of the doctor carrying on a private school of anatomy was negatived by the appearance of a lady on the scene, Miss Phybbs' ready brain had already built up another to take its place, in which, sad to say, a very indifferent construction was put upon her master's character; still, in spite of Mr. Tarrant's discovery, they were, in reality, not one whit wiser than before. Polly had known that men occasionally used that stair for the purpose of visiting her master's laboratory. She knew now that a woman had also used it for the same purpose, and she knew no more. Why they came or what they

came about, she and Dick were quite as ignorant of as ever. They talked the thing over, most exhaustively, during their walk. And while Miss Phybbs ran over the list of ladies who visited the house, endeavouring to put her finger upon the one likely to be guilty of such an indiscretion as secretly visiting her master, Mr. Tarrant arraigned the doctor of every crime in the annals of the police, coining, forgery, burglary, etc., only to reject them one by one. At one time he suggested that he should at once lay what he persisted in terming his discovery before his superiors, but Miss Phybbs was decidedly opposed to that. Openly, she argued that it was useless until they had pushed their investigations somewhat further, and arrived at something more definite. Inwardly, she believed herself upon the track of a domestic scandal, which, though eager to get to the bottom of, she had no wish should go beyond the family circle. And, moreover, would turn out a case with which the police had no concern, so when they eventually parted, it was agreed between them that their lips should be sealed for the present.

The next day Constable Tarrant's duties called him to the head quarters of the police in the city, and while there, lounging about waiting for orders, he heard some of his superiors discussing a communication that they had received from Scotland Yard, relative to a considerable quantity of base coin, with which the Metropolis had suddenly

been flooded, and of the fabrication of which they had so far failed to find the slightest clue. They described the coin as beautifully manufactured and all evidently the work of the same hands. "The constructors are past masters of their craft and must be provided with very superior plant and machinery. There are probably two or three employed in the minting of it, but the issuing must comprehend a very extensive organisation. We need scarcely add, to lay hold of the principals is of the greatest possible importance."

"I don't believe we have anyone here on the smashing lay. At all events not such artists as these are described to be. We may have one or two of the inferior ones about, but they would be in a very small way of business."

"No," rejoined one of his brother officers, thoughtfully, "I don't think such a lot as they speak of could be here without our knowing it. Not likely but what they'd try to pass some of the stuff in a big place like this. What little bad money we've come across lately is of a very inferior manufacture, not calculated to deceive anybody who looked at it twice."

Richard Tarrant sucked all this in greedily. He had settled in his own mind that Dr. Lynden was offending against the laws, and that if Dr. Lynden was not so doing in one way he was in another was a fact fixed and incontrovertible in Dick Tarrant's head; if he was not carrying on

that illegal school of anatomy then doubtless he was manufacturing bad silver by the bushel, and upon no other grounds than these did he once more decide in his own mind what was Dr. Lynden's secret occupation. But though both he and Polly kept watchful eyes upon the side door it was without result. It was a subject of much regret to Miss Phybbs that she had not been a little more punctual in keeping her appointment that afternoon, as she would then probably have caught a glimpse of that lady, and veiled though she might have been, Miss Phybbs confidently asserted that she would have known her again anywhere; but to recognise her from Dick's description was, she ruefully admitted, impossible. Yes, there is no doubt a pronounced taste in dress offers great facilities for identification. The famous Lord Brougham is said to have been constant to shepherd's plaid—a material scarce known to us in the present day—for his nether garments. There are men in London whose hats we could swear to, and confidently predict their presence in the house as we pass their head-gear on the hall table; and I can call to mind a well-known lady, whose taste for bright colours was so conspicuous in her raiment that people at Lord's and Hurlingham made appointments to meet in her vicinity, as a rendezvous, that, though movable, could be seen from afar. If only this unknown lady had but had a penchant of that description. As it was, neither

Tarrant nor Polly Phybbs saw any probability of coming across the mysterious stranger unless she should again pay the doctor a visit.

But there is something in luck, and busy one morning in the heart of the city on some mission of Miss Lynden's, Polly could hardly withhold a cry of exultation upon catching sight of her master talking earnestly with a well-dressed woman who she had no doubt was the lady she was so anxious to catch sight of. She easily contrived to pass them, not too closely, but near enough to obtain a good view of the latter's face. It was one she had never seen before.

"She may visit the master by the side-door," sniffed Miss Phybbs, "but she's never come in at the front;" and her suspicions as to the respectability of the unknown became stronger than ever.

She turned back and repassed them, still contriving to keep unnoticed herself, which was all the more easy from the slow pace at which they were walking and the earnestness of their conversation. And Polly felt then that there was no fear of her not recognising the stranger in future.

A tall, well-preserved woman of forty, on a rather large scale; with an indolent grace in her movement that would have made her a striking figure in any drawing-room. She was richly but quietly dressed, and that she saw her now for the first time Miss Phybbs was certain, though she and the doctor were apparently old acquaintances,

Polly had neither time nor inclination to follow them, but remained satisfied with having succeeded in identifying the stranger. She determined on her way home to say nothing of her morning's adventure to Dick, believing that if she only got to the bottom of it, it would turn out to be a petty scandal, which was no concern of the police.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. SEACOLE'S.

'IT'S eight o'clock, and the Crimean mail's in, and please, miss, Miss Nellie said I was to tell you that all's well,' exclaimed Polly volubly, as she drew back the curtains and threw up the blind of Miss Smerdon's room one bright May morning.

"The mail in!" cried Frances, as she bounded out of bed, plunged into her dressing-gown, and dashed off to Nell's room, to pick up such crumbs of comfort as that young sybarite might choose to drop from the snug depths of her couch, and perhaps at twenty, when thoroughly in earnest, to lie in bed and read love-letters is as entrancing an occupation as a maiden need hope for.

"Captain Byng is all safe," said Miss Lynden, "the return was all a mistake. Hugh says he had the closest possible shave of being killed, and they thought at first he was so; he was stunned with a bullet, but is really only very slightly wounded, and doing well."

"Thank God," said Frances. "I almost wish now I hadn't written to him."

"Oh, Frances, Frances!" rejoined Miss Lynden, laughing, "you're a little the oldest, and I used to think a good deal the wisest, but oh, my dear, you're a sad goose. Here you are in love with a man, and believe in your heart that he's in love with you, and just because he hadn't got the pluck to speak up before he left England, you regret that you've written him a very proper letter, to enquire after him on seeing that he was severely wounded. A very proper letter I dare swear it was—I shouldn't wonder if it began 'Miss Smerdon presents her compliments to Captain Byng, and begs to enquire——'"

"Stop, oh stop, you tease; it wasn't a proper letter, and that's the reason."

"Oh, never mind the reason. I know all about that. I ought to be shocked, but I'm only very glad you were a sensible girl."

"Now tell me what Hugh says, at least as much as may reach the public ear."

"Thank Heaven he's safe; tiresome boy, he says so little about that terrible night, and I do feel so proud of him. His letter's full of nothing but dog hunting, divisional races and all that sort of thing. I'm sure, to read it, the Crimea seems to be a most lovely climate, and they're all having the greatest possible fun out there. It's hard to realise from his letter that they are actually fighting, and that men

are being killed day and night. But now run away. I must really get up and dress. I will read you all the gossip of my letter at breakfast ; at present I've hardly read it myself.

Frances Smerdon walked off to her own room echoing her friend's reflections.

" Yes," she murmured, " that's just what the best of them do ; when the work is serious, they make light of it, and also of any grief that may come to them. There was poor Algie Barnard, at Cowbridge, last year, they said he threw the steeple-chase away by his bad riding ; he made no reply but fainted in the weighing-room, and then they found he had broken two ribs, and that the muscles of his right arm had been laid open in a fall he'd got on the far side of the course. Tom makes light of it, but I've very little doubt his wound is serious." And then Miss Smerdon proceeded to dress, and rack her memory in the meantime for every record in which injuries to the head had terminated fatally ; and as her experiences in that way were principally connected with the hunting-field, by the time she had remembered two concussions of the brain, one case of paralysis, and another of permanent affection of the spine, she had brought herself to a very low and contrite spirit with which to join the breakfast table. Could she but have seen the object of her solicitude in the course of that day, I think she would have almost grieved to think so much womanly pity had been wasted upon him.

If a Crimean winter can be as hard and disagreeable as an English one—and with the exception of one particular, in the matter of fogs, it can quite match it—the country rejoices in one glorious superiority as regards climate. Winter does not linger there all through the spring and half-way through the summer as it does in England, but once got done with, it breaks into genuine spring ; not such a conglomeration of wet and bitter east winds as usually signalises the advent of that season with us, but bright skies, balmy breezes, and all the delights that the poets sing of—and which we so rarely witness. It cannot be said that many flowers came with the spring in '55, for everything that would burn had been burnt by the army during that pitiless winter, and the poor flowers had been so ruthlessly trampled in the mire that the few which had survived had a hard struggle to get their heads above the ground.

However, with the sunshine, as aforesaid, came great exhilaration throughout the camp ; copious supplies of all sorts, and such a multiplication of stores, canteens, cafés, restaurants, etc., as to look as if the Allies would be permanent colonists, with no intention of ever returning to their native countries, to which the establishment of a railway from Balaklava to the front still further contributed. About half-way between these two points on the main road, a large wooden building, half-store, half-restaurant, had been opened by a middle-aged

coloured lady, who had somehow or other obtained considerable popularity amongst military men in the West Indies. What she had done out there I don't know, but Mrs. Seacole soon became a familiar name to the Crimean army. Horse and Foot, Hussars and Artillery, Naval officers and Newspaper correspondents, all drank and dined at Mrs. Seacole's. It was a sort of high change for gossip and stories. Men from all parts brought the news of the camp thither, as the common mart for the exchange of all such commodities. Many dinners came off in the snug room at the back of the front saloon, which was the general lounge; matter of no little diplomacy at times, these dinners as, unless previously ordered, the procuring of a table was impossible.

Perched upon a barrel in the saloon, with a short pipe in his mouth, and bearing no sign whatever of having been severely wounded, sat Tom Byng, indulging in gayest badinage with an old friend who was chaffing him about his late narrow escape.

"It won't do, Tom," said the Hussar; "you must be ruled out of it by all the conditions of war. You were carried away for dead, and we really can't have you coming to life again in this way. Just think of the confusion it would make out here if other people behaved as you have done! Why, we should never know where we were, or who commanded anything. Now I'm very sorry for you, but in justice to the regiment——"

"Shut up, Lockwood," cried Byng. "Just ask how long it's going to be before that dinner's ready ; I'll show you then whether I am alive or not."

"But you're not, my good fellow ; in justice to the regiment you can't be. I don't want to counsel extreme or immoral measures. There is no reason for your completing what the Russian so clumsily attempted ; but you must surely see that it is your duty to withdraw yourself from the army as quietly as may be, and so allow the step to go in the regiment. Consider, my dear fellow, you were killed !"

"No more of your chaff !" rejoined Tom Byng. "Let's have a sherry and bitters. I don't think any of our fellows would care to get their step at my expense."

"No, old man," returned the other, as they made their way to the counter, "I'm sure they wouldn't. And nobody can be more pleased than myself that that Russian miscalculated the thickness of your head."

And now a gentleman in his shirt-sleeves, called by courtesy a waiter, announced to Lockwood, the presiding genius of the feast, that dinner was ready ; and the *convives*, some half-dozen in number, trooped into the back room to do it justice.

"Are you going to run that big bay horse of yours, Fleming, for the Division Cup next week ? If they don't make the hurdles too stiff he ought to have a great chance," said Lockwood, the keen edge of their appetites being somewhat appeased.

"Yes," replied Hugh, "he's improved a good deal in his jumping of late."

"Well, he need to," remarked an officer of the Rifles. "I was over the course yesterday, and they've got a stone wall in it that will take some doing I can tell you. It's a good four foot and a half high, and no give about it. A real proper crumpler for those who happen to hit it hard."

"Well," rejoined Hugh, laughing, "I shall find out if the 'Bantam' can jump anyhow."

"For your sake it's to be devoutly hoped he can," said the Rifleman. "However, the meeting will be great fun, and we want something to wake us up a bit, this d—d trench work is getting monotonous. 'Pon my word I haven't heard a joke or a good story for the last week."

"Right you are," said Byng, gravely. "The whole thing is getting slow, deuced slow. If it wasn't for Mickey Flinn I'd have forgotten how to laugh."

"And who's Mickey Flinn?" enquired Lockwood.

"A distinguished ornament of my company," said Byng, "with a very poor opinion of those who guide and direct him. We were down in the trenches the other night, and amongst the men was a young recruit only just out from England. Whether the poor fellow was a little flustered, it being his first time under fire, or whether, as he said, he had strayed a little from his party and lost his way, I don't know, but Mr. Flinn took it into his

sagacious head that the boy was trying to desert. Well, he got hold of a young non-commissioned officer and they made the boy a prisoner. And then came the formulating a charge against him. They could not bring him up for deserting, because he obviously had not deserted, they had only caught him straying towards the town, so they finally charged him before the Colonel with 'attempting to enter Sebastopol without leave.' The chief burst out laughing when he heard the charge, and exclaimed, 'Why, confound it, that's what we've all been doing ever since we came here.'"

"And what did Mr. Flinn say?" enquired Lockwood.

"Oh, he was heard discoursing to his comrades the whole afternoon on the subject, saying, 'It's without lave, mind you, makes the difference.' He is evidently firmly imbued that, 'If they'd only permission he and a few of his pals would be inside Sebastopol in no time.'"

"I know the sort," said the Hussar, "there's no end to that fellow's jaw, but he'll fight as long as he'll jaw and ask for no better diversion. But you're wrong about the siege; you fellows that half live in the trenches can't see it, but to men like myself who only have a look round occasionally, it's palpable how close we are creeping in. It cannot be long now, at all events, before you have a shy at the town."

Lockwood was right in his prognostication, but

what he did not dream of was that the desperate assault, when delivered, should result in failure, and that in less than three hours both French and English would have been driven back, and nothing left them but to bury their dead—nearly three months more destined to elapse before the famous siege was brought to an end.

However, the dinner came to an end, the bill was paid, and horses and ponies called for, and then swinging themselves into the saddle the majority of the party rode off in the bright moonlight, across the plateau, to their respective lines. Before reaching their own camp, Byng and Hugh Fleming had bidden good night to their companions. Hugh's servant rose from a seat outside his master's tent as they approached, and, as he took the pony from him, said :

"The mail's in from England, sir. I've put your letters in your tent."

"Good night," said Byng, as he also dismounted, and strode away to his own dwelling, envying Hugh the letter he knew he would surely find awaiting him, and feeling utterly indifferent towards his own correspondence. Yet he was fond of his own people too, but he had no need to feel anxious about them ; and like most men in those days, hardly realised the uneasiness and nervous solicitude of the women at home—mothers and sisters filled with considerably more anxiety for sons and brothers than they deserved.

There were three letters on the table, the superscriptions of two of which were quite familiar to him ; but the third was in an unknown hand, and that unmistakeably a feminine one. Tom gazed at it curiously, with an indistinct idea that he had seen the hand before, although he could not recognize it. He opened it, and then sat down on his bed to read it by the light of his solitary candle.

“DEAR CAPTAIN BYNG,” it ran, “We are dreadfully concerned to see by the papers that you are dangerously wounded. It is terrible to think that those we have known and ” [here the word “loved ” had been palpably erased] “and liked should be in such constant peril. You can’t think how I feel for poor Nellie Lynden—it must be so awful for her to think that her lover is in the midst of all these dreadful scenes. I am sure she must shudder every time she opens a paper for fear of coming across Hugh Fleming’s name in it.”

(“Hum !” muttered Byng, savagely. “Considering the pleasant things she has said about Hugh and the rest of us, I suppose she’s disappointed to find that we’re in the thick of it at last.”)

“I have been staying with her, and she bears up beautifully. And now, dear Captain Byng, you must find time to write a line about yourself. We only know what the papers tell us, and that is that you are dangerously hurt, and that’s quite bad enough news for your friends and relations, for

all those who really care for you. We shall all be so very anxious to hear how you are going on. I shall never believe that you are in a fair way to recovery till I get a line from yourself. Let it be ever such a scrap, I shall feel miserable, that is, mamma and I will feel miserable, until we learn from your own hand that you are getting well again. With much love and sympathy from us both, and hoping to hear from you soon, believe me, dear Captain Byng,

“Ever sincerely yours,

“FRANCES SMERDON.”

There is a slang phrase in the present day that so exactly describes the effect that letter had on Tom Byng, that I cannot refrain from using it. It made him “sit up.” The letter fell from his hand as he finished it, and he started bolt-upright from his crouching attitude, and wondered what it all meant. Surely a girl could hardly write a letter like that to a man she disliked. It was very odd, and after thinking it over for some minutes Tom felt so utterly bewildered at this unexpected epistle that he felt it necessary to fill a pipe and smoke and muse over it.

He read the letter over three or four times, and finally came to the conclusion that the ways of women were past all understanding, and that he must see if he could pump Hugh Fleming on the subject a bit to-morrow. Poor Tom, if he had

been making a match three miles across country, the chances are he'd have contrived to get seven pounds the best of it ; nor was he likely to throw away a point of odds on the race-course, nor trump his partner's thirteenth at the whist table, but when it came to the opposite sex he was but as wax in their hands. One of these men, who, though not particularly impressionable, find it so difficult to say "no" to a woman's request. Frances Smerdon had nobody to blame but herself for the present state of affairs between them. Despite his Quixotic resolutions she could have made him speak, "'an she had listed," before he sailed, and she knew it.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM'S VISITOR IN THE ADVANCE.

IN his bewilderment over night, Tom Byng had forgotten to glance at the order book which was lying on his table, otherwise he would have found that his recreations for the next day were amply provided for him ; that he was detailed for a court-martial in the morning, and that in the evening he was once more for the trenches. The consequence was that he found no opportunity for that insidious cross-examination of Hugh Fleming, and it so happened that Hugh, who since the death of Grogan had been acting as a captain, was not included in the covering party formed by the —th in the evening. On his arrival at the brigade

ground, Byng found he was for the advanced trenches, and though in those weary watches that had gone by, a man had oft-times much leisure to brood over his affairs, yet the nights had waxed much livelier of late, and those in the advance had to be so continually on the alert, that they had not much time to meditate on a love chase gone awry, or how to assuage the angry importunities of creditors whose patience was at length exhausted, two circumstances that a year ago claimed a good deal of attention from most of them. Although nothing but the occasional monotonous roar of the big guns broke through the silence of the night, yet Tom and his comrades kept vigilant watch and ward. They were dealing with an enemy bold and energetic, who threw no chances away, and whose skirmishers stole up nightly as near as they dared, to see if too fatal a sense of security might grant them the opportunity for a sortie which they were always seeking. However, daybreak came without even an alarm, and the sun shone brightly out over the shattered town, heralding the advent of a glorious day towards the very end of May. Byng was sitting with his back to the parapet of the trench, musing dreamily over Frances Smerdon's letter and what reply he should make to it, when he was once more recalled to a sense of sublimity matters by his more mercurial subaltern, who suddenly exclaimed :

“ I say, Tom, do you remember what day this is ? ”

"Yes, Wednesday," replied Byng, lazily.

"Wednesday; yes, sir; *the* Wednesday, by Jove! It's the Derby Day, and what a day they've got for it. Do you recollect going up last year and seeing Andover win?"

"Yes," laughed the other; "and how we all backed King Tom, and saw our horse run a good second on three legs; showing that but for the mishap he ought to have won."

"Ah, yes, but what fun we had all the same. What a lunch we had with those dragoon fellows over on the hill. They were all on Andover—drank buckets of champagne to celebrate his success, and insisted upon our drowning our losses in the same manner. Ah, we were a credit to the regiment on that occasion!—patterns of sobriety to the whole British Army!—after having been engaged in such a revel."

"*Tempora mutantur*, as they taught us at school," laughed Byng. "Last year pigeon pie, plovers' eggs, and Geisler's brüt were hardly good enough for us, and now I'm dying for the sight of that villainous servant of mine with the tea and cold bacon. Surely they're awfully late with our breakfast."

"No, just eight," rejoined his companion, glancing at his watch. "Listen, there go the clocks inside," and he jerked his head in the direction of the town.

A few minutes more and two or three servants

belonging to the regiment made their appearance, carrying their masters' breakfasts with them. Very much to the astonishment of Tom and his companions came also a French officer, in the uniform of the Zouaves, the triple row of gold lace round his *kepi*, and the elaborate embroidery on the sleeve of his smart, dark blue jacket, indicating that he was a captain, just as much as his shaven forehead, *farouche* manner and voluminous red *pantalons* added "and of the Zouaves."

Tom raised his cap politely to the Frenchman, whose *kepi* was off instantly in return, and then could not help casting a look of enquiry at his henchman.

"The Colonel commanding the third parallel, sir, told me to bring this French officer to you. And will you be so good as to show him all there is to be seen in the advance."

The French officer with a flourish of his cap commenced a voluble speech in his own language, to the effect that if he might trespass upon the amiability of Monsieur he would wish to see what we were doing in the Front. Tom's knowledge of the French language, like that of the majority of his brethren in the English Army, was limited in the extreme, and the quick-witted Zouave saw at once he was not understood. He changed instantly into the Anglo-Saxon vernacular.

"Ah, monsieur," he continued, "you no like to speak French. You English all can, but you

nevare will, *mon ami*. I am engaged like yourself, in this stupide siege, knocking our heads for months against this pig of a town. I sometimes wish I was back in Africa; chasing the Kabyles was more amusing than this. This morning I said to myself—‘*Mon cher*, you ennui yourself, you get the rust, you get the—what do you call it—ah, bored, you require the change, you want distraction.’ I said to my chief—‘*Mon colonel*, this fatigues me, these pigs of Russians will not knock me on the head, although, *ma foi*,’” he continued, with a shrug of his shoulders and a grimace, “they have been making it lively enough for us lately. With your permission to-day, I will go and look at our gallant Allies. I will study the little lanes and ditches they make, and see if I like them better than our own.’ And now, Monsieur, I must throw myself upon your good nature, as soon as you have finished your breakfast. Permit me to offer you a cigarette,” and having handed his case to Tom, the Zouave selected one for himself, and throwing himself on the ground, proceeded to smoke and chat as easily as if he had known his companions all his life. He was very communicative about his past, he gave them to understand that he was a Parisian by birth, and that Paris was the only place fit to live in. ‘But you do not live there for nothing, my friends; and when one has come to the end of one’s resources, there is nothing for a gentleman but the Seine, or Africa and the Zouaves.

I chose the latter, and *parole d'honneur* I have never regretted it. It's a wild service ours, but it makes the pulses tingle in your veins—there is not one of us but what has won his rank at the sword's point."

Tom felt there was something fascinating about his guest, in spite of his somewhat braggadocio manner. He had the bearing, moreover, of a man who had certainly been accustomed to good society, and Tom knew that what he said of his corps was true, and that the dare-devil troops of which he was a captain had little reverence for any officers who had not won their grade under their own eyes. Breakfast over, Tom began his task as *cicerone*, and was much struck by the shrewd, soldierly criticisms of the stranger.

"Ah, yes," he said at length, "that flank battery of our friends opposite it is which enfilades the *boyau*, which I came up between this and the third parallel ; but, *mon ami*, what do you propose to do next ? Your engineers must know that you can go no farther ; the ground is too hard. This is your advanced trench of all, I presume ?" And as he spoke the French officer leaned his elbows on the parapet lazily ; "and to say nothing of the *abattis*, you're a long way from the Redan." He continued to stare at the great earthwork in question, alongside Tom, although more than one bullet whistled past their heads. Suddenly he sprang upon the parapet, and, not to be outdone in hardihood, Tom immediately followed his example.

"*Sacré !*" said the Zouave, laughing ; "*mais*, your company is undesirable. They will think we are the leaders of a storming party." And even as he spoke, the persistent attentions of the Russian sharp-shooters once more sang past their heads. "*Peste !*" he continued, throwing away his cigarette, and making a comical grimace at Byng. "This is getting a little too hot to remain. Adieu, monsieur." And in another second he had bounded down the far side of the parapet, and was flying as fast as his feet would carry him in the direction of the Redan, waving a white handkerchief, which he had hastily drawn from his pocket, as he did so.

For an instant Tom was taken aback, and then the truth flashed upon him that he had unwittingly been entertaining a Russian spy, and had shown him all round our advanced position. He never hesitated for a moment, but at once started in hot pursuit. Either he must bring back his treacherous guest a prisoner, or he would be well-nigh chaffed out of the army, when the story of his entertaining that *soi-disant* Zouave got abroad. Tom could run a bit, and it soon became apparent it would be a very fine thing, in spite of the lead he had stolen, for the Russian to hold his own. It was impossible for either side to fire, the chances being about as much in favour of hitting one man as the other. The parapets on both sides were thronged with men who had jumped from the trenches to see this

impromptu match, and though Tom had gained very little upon him, yet the spy had this point against him—Between him and the great Redan ran the *abattis*, and though, from the straightness of his path, the spot where he could slip through was doubtless all prepared for him, yet a slight delay was inevitable, and it was a fine point whether he could pass that before Tom's hand was upon him. Nearer and nearer they came to the barrier, and it was soon evident to all the spectators that Byng was the better "stayer" of the two, and a ringing cheer from the British trenches recognised the fact. A hasty glance or two over his shoulder, speedily convinced the fugitive of the same. He saw his pursuer rapidly closing on him, and suddenly pausing for a moment in his flight, he drew a revolver from his breast and deliberately fired at his foe. He only precipitated events, for blown by his run, and with a hand that had lost its accustomed steadiness in consequence of his exertions, he missed his man, and before he could repeat the shot a tremendous blow from Tom's fist stretched him well-nigh senseless close under the *abattis*.

A roar of exultation arose from the spectators on the one side, and a yell of disappointment from those on the other. The two men were still in such close propinquity that it would have been perfectly impossible for the riflemen on either side to interfere, even had there not seemed to be a tacit

understanding that the struggle between the two men should be regarded in the light of a duel, with which the onlookers had no right to meddle. For two or three minutes the men remained at the foot of the *abattis*, the Russian recumbent and Tom leaning over him, with the pistol now transferred to his own hand pointed at his enemy's head.

"I'm going to either take you straight back as soon as you've recovered your wind," said Tom, in the quiet steady tones of a man who is greatly in earnest about what he says, "or scatter your brains out here and have done with it."

"Bah," rejoined the other, with a fierce flash of defiance in his grey eyes, "I have played and lost. I know the penalty, as well here as at the back of your trench an hour hence; quick, Monsieur."

"On the faith of an English officer your life shall be spared if you render yourself a prisoner. Refuse," and Byng once more pointed the pistol at his opponent's head.

"*Sapristi*," rejoined the Russian, as he rose to his feet, "I've not much choice, but while there is life there's another chance, and you guarantee me that?"

"I'll pledge my word for your life," returned Byng, still keeping a firm grip of his prisoner's collar.

"The game was worth it," rejoined the Russian, as he walked towards the English trenches, in the grip of his captor. "A majority against a file of musketeers and a short shrift; now I suppose it

means a prison for an indefinite period. *Fortune de la guerre.*"

"It's not likely that we shall let you go to make use of the intelligence you've collected," replied Tom, as he handed his prisoner over the parapet into the hands of his own men, who, though regarding him with the contempt that employment as a spy always brings upon the detected, still could not withhold a tribute of admiration to the splendid audacity with which the Russian had played his part.

Tom marched his prisoner to the second parallel, and there handed him over to the Colonel commanding in the trenches, and told his story, concluding with :

"I have pledged my word for his life, and I must be allowed, sir, to make good my promise."

"You may rest quite easy on that point, Captain Byng," returned his superior. "I will relieve you of your charge, and shall send him direct to head-quarters with that intimation."

The *soi-disant* Zouave had listened with the utmost nonchalance to the story of his misdeeds, but as Byng turned to leave, he exclaimed :

"Adieu, monsieur. May I ask the name of the officer to whom I am indebted for my life?"

"Captain Byng of the —th," replied Tom, shortly.

"Captain Byng—how do you spell him? B I—no, B Y N G. I shall recollect that name. Byng, you have saved my life, and some day, perhaps,

who knows? it will be my turn. It's a queer world," and with a shrug of his shoulders Lieut. Ivanhoff raised his *kepi* to Tom, and started with his escort on his tramp to head-quarters.

For the next few days Tom Byng's adventure with the Russian spy was the talk of the camp; and that the story as it was bandied from mouth to mouth should meet with much embellishment, was but natural. There were scoffers who declared that the whole thing was a friendly running match, got up to relieve the tediousness of the advanced trenches, that a deal of money had changed hands in the transaction, that the Russians had paid in paper roubles which were unnegotiable in our lines; in short, the story was bruited about with whatever garnish crossed the imagination of the jesters of the army, and in a week incidents in the Crimea were so narrated that the chief actors failed to recognise them. There was a well-known officer who, when wounded, was reported by the papers to have exhorted his fellow sufferers to bear their agony patiently, but camp gossip gave a very different version of the pithy speech which he made on that occasion. As for Lieut. Ivanhoff, he remained interned on the banks of the Bosphorus until the close of the war, and years afterwards obtained high distinction in that campaign in which the intervention of Europe compelled Russia to stay her victorious career, and sign peace under the very walls of Constantinople.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOURTH DIVISION RACES.

THERE is a very fairly sized crowd gathered on the plateau before Sebastopol; half the officers not on duty have drawn together to see the Fourth Divisional races decided. But for a few flags one would have hardly recognised that a day's fun of this sort was proposed, and that the race card (there are cards, gentlemen) shows no less than five events, not including the "moke race," to be decided. No Crimean race meeting could be brought to a satisfactory conclusion without this latter institution, and there is a Light Dragoon who is the very *bête noir* of all owners of likely mules, and who well nigh sweeps the board (I had well nigh said of cups) of purses for this interesting race.

There is an absence of stands, tents, and a good many other adjuncts of an ordinary race-course, notably the total absence of ladies, which gives a business air to the whole thing, which is utterly fictitious. In reality there is no end of gossip and laughter over the whole affair, and although the races are all correctly printed on the card there is little attempt at keeping Newmarket time here. We start comfortably when everyone is ready, nor

are there any very close restrictions about colours ; breeches and boots most of the jockeys have managed, but the racing jacket is not strictly *de rigueur*, although from the number of them that crop up it seems that a good many men must have been impressed with the idea that it was a useful thing to slip into the bottom of a bullock trunk. There is much quiet lunching going on—not such as you see at Epsom or at the back of the stand at Ascot, but “just a snack, and a glass of phiz, you know,” yet partaken of amidst as much mirth and good fellowship as ever it was at the above-mentioned meetings at home.

The great event of the day is the Divisional Open Cup, for which there are only four competitors, but those four are supposed to be the best representatives that the Army can boast, though they might not, perhaps, prove of much account amongst a lot of Selling Platers at Newmarket. These things, you see, are comparative ; we all know the proverb of the one-eyed man, and the present quartet represent the Kings of the Crimean turf. About the merits of the four there is much difference of opinion—that the Bantam and Thunder are the pick of the basket is generally conceded ; which is the best is a matter of contention. In turf parlance they can both race and stay, but whether they are safe jumpers is a little open to question. The second Divisional Open Cup is a steeplechase—that is, the best

imitation that three miles over artificial fences can compass.

Handy Andy's party, who are very sweet upon their horse, begin picking up all the long odds they can obtain, they swear that their horse doesn't know how to fall, and that what he may lack in speed will be more than compensated for by his superb jumping powers. As for the owner of the fourth, he fairly admits he's afraid the company is a little too good for him, but says that he likes a ride, that his horse is very well and a safe jumper, that he shall just trust to the chapter of accidents, and that he shall at all events have a good view of the race. That the —th should be deeply interested in the Cup is not surprising. Is not the Bantam the property of one of their own officers? And is not Hugh Fleming going to ride it himself? There is a certain *esprit de corps* in these things, and from the Colonel's tenner to the drummer's shilling, the regiment are on to a man. There is much discussion about the stone wall, about which the owner of Handy Andy and his friends are especially jubilant.

"Tear an ages," cries the former, a Major of the Connaught Rangers, "av' it was only a foot higher I'd come in alone. There's not one of the lot such a lepper as my horse. Why I'd lay a level fifty I'd ride him in and out of the pound at Ballinasloe."

A little way off Hugh Fleming is in earnest conversation with Byng. He is carefully listening to his mentor's final instructions before weighing out.

"You see," says Tom, "nicely as the Bantam jumps, still he's young at the business, and it's quite on the cards he may make a mistake if he's flurried. We know he can jump the stone wall, and that's the ugliest fence on the course, because we've been schooling him over one just like it for the last three weeks. Take a good pull at him when it comes, and let him have it easy. The only horse you can't afford to let get away from you in the race is Thunder, and I fancy he'll no more want to hurry at the stone wall than you will. As for the other two you've so much the heels of them you can catch them any time. Whether we can beat Thunder we don't quite know, but anyhow I don't think you'll find you've much in hand."

Needless to say there is no ring, and such wagering as there is is done amongst the spectators themselves. More than one holder of Her Majesty's commission tries his 'prentice hand at book-making and gets bitten with a madness destined to cost him dear in days to come. A little buzz of criticism runs through the crowd as the competitors for the Cup take their preliminary canter. "Thunder looks very fit." "Who will lay me three to one to a tenner about the Bantam?" "What the deuce does Tom Joskins mean by running that old crock of his?" He's a good horse, I'll take fifty to five about his chance." "Good horse if you like, but he's got into rather too good company this time." "You can put it

down," and a babel of similar remarks are bandied about as—the preliminary over—the four competitors make their way to the starting post. Being the race of the day, and numbering so few runners, their jockeys have contrived to appear in correct costume. The flag falls without delay, and at once the rider of Handy Andy takes the horse to the front, and in the words of his owner—"Begins pounding away in real earnest." The horse certainly is a magnificent jumper, but he can go only one pace, and his jockey is quite aware of it. He knows that his chance of victory must depend upon Thunder and Bamtam either falling, or from their riders, in fear of such casualty, suffering him to obtain so long a lead that they are unable to catch him, but the artilleryman who is riding Thunder is cunning of fence, and was well-known between the flags before the war broke out. He is not the least afraid of his making a mistake at present, but he does know that a tired horse is very apt to blunder, and thinks that he would rather have a little in hand and be able to take that wall easy in the second round, for they have to traverse the course twice.

Handy Andy meanwhile sails gaily along in advance, with Thunder lying at his quarters; the black jacket of Hugh Fleming some two lengths in arrear, and Tom Joskins on his old crock whipping in.

And now came one of those curious incidents

which when seen on a race-course always remind one of the way the coloured bits of glass fall apart on the turning of a kaleidoscope. As they came to the wall, the young Irishman who was riding Handy Andy, thinking his horse was accustomed to it, sent him at the jump with a wild whoop and a flourish of his whip. The result was disastrous ; for, swerving from the whip, Handy Andy jumped just across Thunder, and the two came down together in a confused heap. Hugh Fleming, in order to keep clear of the collision, pulled his horse so sharply to one side that the Bantam had to jump the wall almost sideways ; the consequence was, he struck the wall slightly, blundered upon landing, and after struggling gallantly to recover himself, pitched forward on his knees and head and rolled over, leaving Tom Joskins, who had got safely over to the right, alone in his glory.

At such an unexpected collapse of the race, quite a shout went up from the spectators, and numbers of them galloped off as hard as they could to the scene of the accident. Hugh Fleming and the Bantam soon struggled to their feet again, but the riders of the other two horses lay where they had fallen ; and a whisper ran round the hillock, which served the purpose of a grand stand, that both men were killed. Whether this was the case or not, it was quite certain that neither made any attempt to rise, which usually betokens serious disaster.

Tom Joskins, wide awake to such a chance as

had befallen him, wasted no time in looking what were the results of the collision, but took his old horse by the head, and sent him along best pace, quite aware that the further he got on his journey before any of his antagonists got up, the better. He went on for some time before he even ventured to throw a glance over his shoulders, and then found that there was nothing anywhere near him. He thought he had it all to himself, so commenced to take it a little more easily ; and it was not until he passed the hillock and heard the warning cry of his friends, that he became aware there was anything left in the race but himself.

Hugh had never lost hold of the bridle, but both he and the Bantam were rather shaken by the fall ; and even when he had regained his saddle and set his horse going again, Hugh felt that he must give him a little time to recover, and that any attempt to hurry him at present would prove fatal. He wondered in his own mind whether it was of any use persevering when he looked at the tremendous lead that Joskins had got of him. His horse might be the quicker of the two, but then he dared not make use of his speed just yet, and in any case was it possible to make up all that ground before the race was over ?

“No matter,” muttered Hugh, “I’ll see him over the stone wall a second time at all events. It settled three of us the first round, it might settle him the second.”

But it was not to be. Joskins' old crock jumped the fatal wall without the slightest mistake, and though the Bantam ran game as gold and materially lessened the gap between him and his leader, yet he never could get fairly within hail of him, and Hugh, when he found pursuit was useless, pulled up and left Joskins to secure an easy victory.

"Well, after such a turn up as that," exclaimed the owner of Handy Andy, "it's to be hoped the Engineers have something for us to-night. If there's anything they want taking, they'll find the Rangers in a lovely humour for it; they are broke to a man."

"I'm afraid," rejoined Byng, "our fellows are in much the same state; by-the-way, what do the doctors say of the two victims of the accident?"

"Knocked about a bit and shook," replied the Major, "but they are not broken seriously. Poor Tim Donovan, the theatrical young beggar, he rode as if he was showing off a horse at Bartlemy Fair." The further events of the day have nothing to do with this history; that moke-racing Hussar once more carried off the race of those quadrupeds, in his usual artistic fashion, sitting well back on the animal's quarters, in his shirt sleeves, and with his gold-laced forage cap set jauntily on one side.

Tom Byng, over a solitary pipe in his own tent that evening, reflected rather ruefully that Miss Smerdon's letter was still unanswered. Circum-

stances had prevented him from conferring with Hugh Fleming in the first place; and secondly, Hugh, out of sheer *malice prepense*, had not only declined to be pumped, but, worse still, could not be induced to talk the thing over; whenever Byng brought the thing fairly forward, Hugh either changed the subject, or at once turned the subject round to his own love affair, and that once started, he had so much to say that his auditor was more likely to grow weary than to get a word in. Still, that letter had to be written, two mails had already gone out, and in mere ordinary courtesy he could no longer delay sending a reply. Through Nellie Lynden, Frances would of course be aware that his injuries offered no excuse for his silence. What was he to say? He loved this girl, but he could not forget that she had laughed at him, and flouted the Regiment. Few people like to be laughed at, and ridicule has made more bitter enemies than ever good sound abuse has done. There are men who would sooner lead the forlorn hope than be the laugh of the town for three days, and the woman who forgives a man for placing her in a ridiculous situation shows a magnanimity scarce to be counted on. Pens, ink, and paper lay before him, and still this man, who had never hesitated an instant to risk his life for the capture of a spy, could not make up his mind to write a few lines in reply to a pretty girl's kind enquiries after his health.

"Here goes," he said at last—"she's laughed at me once, she shall have no opportunity to laugh at me again, as, if I allowed an atom of sentiment to appear, she certainly would."

"DEAR MISS SMERDON," he wrote—"Very many thanks to you and Mrs. Smerdon for your kind enquiries. You have, of course, heard by this that my being returned wounded was a mistake, and I can assure you that I never was in better health and spirits than I am just now. If the work out here is a bit hard at times, there is, at all events, plenty to eat and drink—two very important things when campaigning—and we have undergone none of the bitter experiences of those who were here the first winter. Although not wrapped in 'cotton-wool,' and taking our share of the hard knocks, we are as a whole doing wondrous well. With kindest regards to yourself and all at Twmbarlym,

"Yours sincerely,

"THOMAS BYNG.

"Camp before Sebastopol, July 30."

When Miss Smerdon received this terse reply to her letter she flushed to the roots of her hair, ground her little white teeth, and cried with very shame and vexation. She had never felt so humiliated in her life. She—as proud a girl as ever stepped—in the madness of her passion, had

stooped to tell a man she loved him ! Who could put any other construction upon such a letter as she had penned ? How she wished she had never written ! How she wished her letter had been as icily cold as Nellie had laughingly suggested. What must he think of her ? Ah, he had his revenge now ! Here were her own bitter jibes thrown contemptuously in her face. She pictured him with almost a derisive smile on his lips as he posted those curt few lines in reply to her own too effusive epistle.

Shame on her ! She had told her secret again and again in that wretched note ! No man on reading it could doubt that the writer proffered him her love—and at that thought Frances buried her face in her hands—unasked. What had she done ? Forgot her very sex, offered herself as a wife and been rejected. It would have been better for her, she thought, if that Russian bullet had gone a trifle lower, and then she could have wept openly over his death, and have been spared this nethermost misery. Ah, no, Heaven help her, she did not mean that ; God watch over and save him, and send him safe through the perils that surrounded him, although he never could be anything to her now.

It comes hard upon a woman to have the precious spikenard of her first love rejected, and Frances Smerdon's had gathered in strength from the very efforts she had made to repress it.

She said no word to Nellie of the letter she had received. It had been brought up to her room early in the morning, and therefore Miss Lynden had no positive knowledge on the subject, but she soon saw in the girl's face that she had heard from Byng, and from her making no allusion to her letter, had no doubt that it was unsatisfactory. Frances seemed as interested as ever, when the conversation turned upon the Crimea, but Nellie noticed that instead of taking her share in it, as she had done heretofore, she was now content to be for the most part a listener. As for Tom Byng, I don't think he was quite so well satisfied with that composition of his, as he was when he first posted it. At all events Hugh Fleming heard no more of Miss Smerdon from his chum, and marvelled much what he had said in reply to that young lady's enquiries.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LADY OF THE ROSES.

ALTHOUGH Dr. Lynden had been a comparatively short time in Manchester, he had achieved a considerable social status there amongst the better and more refined circles. A suave, courteous gentleman who had evidently seen much of the world, and could talk well on most of the leading topics of the day. His knowledge of foreign politics was regarded with profound respect by his intimates. His forecasts of the strange events of

that stormy period had proved wonderfully correct, and what Lynden thought of things was a question constantly asked by the leading business men there to whom the war was excessively repugnant. Some few objected to it on moral grounds, and still fewer on the conviction that the game was not worth the candle; that the struggle was unnecessary; that we were pulling the chestnuts out of the fire to serve the French, and that Russia would willingly have undertaken to do nothing that would interfere with our interests if we would only have kept out of the quarrel; but to the bulk of the Manchester men the war was distasteful, as it always is to men who get their living by trade. The extension of business is not brought about by the winning of battles. War must of necessity be paid for by the nations indulging in it, and has never yet conduced to the acquisition of riches, which is, after all, the main object of all manufacturing industries, or for the matter of that of most other employments in this world.

In the very beginning of the trouble the Doctor had prophesied that it would all end in war. When people pooh-poohed him and said it was ridiculous to suppose that we should ever take part in another European war—that in these days of advanced civilisation it was preposterous to think that we should have resort to such a barbarous way of adjusting our differences, the Doctor replied :

“ It's just that belief that you will never engage

in another European war that will bring it about. That is Russia's idea also. As for civilisation—it exercises very little restraint on the passions when roused. Human nature never changes, and asserts itself in defiance of civilisation whenever you come to the crucial test. Your rulers think you will not fight; but the nation is on the boil, and will have it so. Yes, there will be war, and not a little one, you will see."

Not only had the Doctor's prognostications proved correct upon that occasion, but either his foreknowledge or his information about the march of events was singularly accurate. He took the keenest interest in the struggle in front of Sebastopol. He had carefully studied the best maps it was possible for him to procure; while his knowledge of our numbers in the Crimea, of what reinforcements we had under orders to join the army in the field, and of what our garrisons in the Mediterranean consisted, was remarkable. Not only was he a close reader of the daily papers, but it was pretty certain that information concerning the war reached him from other quarters. He was always willing to discuss the situation in the Crimea with Miss Smerdon and his daughter.

"Ah, yes," he said one afternoon when he came in for his cup of tea, "the drama progresses apace. With the fall of Sepastopol will end the first act. That we should take that, is necessary to our insular pride; and, even if we wished it, it is hardly likely

that the Russians would allow us to re-embark. The French, I see, have taken the Mamelon—do you know what that means? That is preparatory on the part of our Allies to a request that we will take the great Redan, which, it is said, they find a thorn in their sides. Yes, it is probable that the curtain will fall on the first act before the end of the month. And then, ah, then—what next? We shall have dealt Russia a blow at the extremity of her empire, but we cannot get at the heart. Napoleon tried that—and a pretty mess he made of it. We have no Napoleons now.”

Dr. Lynden had usually been singularly accurate in his prognostications concerning the siege, and he was so far right that a general assault on the place was imminent, but what never occurred to him, any more than it did to many of the chiefs actually present before Sebastopol, was that the attack might fail. The siege had already lasted seven months, and it was not to be supposed when the Allies did deliver an assault it could be anything but a *coup de grâce*. Why, even in this affair of the Mamelon, the Zouaves had reached the ditch of the Malakoff, and it was believed, had they been properly supported, they could have taken that work. Oh no, the first act must be very nearly played.

“You think,” asked his daughter, “that the final assault will take place before June is over?”

“Yes,” replied the Doctor. “The trenches are a perpetual drain upon our army that can be endured

but little longer, while the Russians have left thousands by the way side on that terrible march across the Steppes, but when men, as in their case, believe their ruler to be both their king and their God, they'll be always ready to die for him.

Miss Smerdon's first impulse on receipt of Byng's letter, had been at once to return home, but when she found that Nellie abstained from questioning her on the subject she reflected that her mother would be scarcely likely to show such reticence, and so came to the conclusion that she had best stay where she was for the present. The Crimean war exercised a great influence over people's minds at that period, and to a romantic girl like Frances, with a special interest in the welfare of one of the actors in the drama, it became a positive fascination. She heard, somewhat more quickly, to say nothing of more directly, through Nellie, of what was taking place there ; and then at Twmbarlyn, there would be nobody to explain the intention of the siege operations so lucidly as the Doctor. Even Polly Phybbs had at times her scrap of information to give concerning it derived from letters received from her brother, and there was no piece of intelligence from the —th but what was worth listening to, in the opinion of the two girls.

There is nothing like a common bond of hopes and fears to draw people of different grades together. Miss Smerdon's heart at that time yearned towards anyone who had near and dear belongings

in the Crimea. This caused her to unbend somewhat towards Polly Phybbs, and once more her thoughts travelled in the direction of Blue Beard's chamber. True, she was mainly absorbed in the war, but for all that her mind at times would wander to other things. Again she talked the subject over with Polly, and found that young woman now quite as curious as herself about it. But Phybbs, while carefully listening to all Miss Smerdon's views of the mystery avoided any mention of her own suspicions. Still the result of their joint curiosity was that, while Frances was perpetually teasing the Doctor to be allowed a sight of the laboratory, Phybbs was constantly hovering about its door, prepared to take instant advantage of finding it open. The Doctor was much too keen an observer not to become speedily aware of this, he further was not long in discovering that a rather bullet-headed young policeman was also taking unwonted interest in the side door of his house, keeping his eye on it, indeed, in such clumsy fashion as caused Dr. Lynden to give way to a fit of low, silent laughter.

"Oh, dear," he muttered, "these provincial police don't seem to have acquired the very elements of their profession or they never could have set such a young numskull as that to keep watch over *me*. I wonder what it is they suspect me of. It does not much matter, they have guessed wide of the mark, I have little doubt. That girl Phybbs too

is always lurking about the door of the laboratory ; well, she would make nothing of it if she got inside ; it would take an agent of the French secret police to do that, and even he might come, and welcome, give me but a few hours' notice of his visit. True, I have done it before successfully, but I don't like living under surveillance. Phybbs, my good girl, you are an excellent servant, and I don't mean to part with you. My charming Miss Smerdon, too, I really must calm the fever in her blood. There is only one way to cure women of an attack of curiosity—gratify it. Ah, I will leave the secret portal open to-morrow and give you both the desired opportunity, and you will find nothing ! Now this pudding-headed young policeman—the idea of watching my house must assuredly have been put into his head ; he never would have conceived it of his own intelligence. Hum ! I should rather like to know what crotchet it is that his superiors have got into their brains."

True to his resolve, the Doctor next morning, after lounging into the drawing-room and announcing that he was going into the city, departed, leaving the door of the laboratory ajar—a circumstance speedily noted by Miss Phybbs. That young woman jumped at the chance, and determined to institute a thorough good search through the apartment, and see if she could lay her hands upon any slight feminine belongings, such as ladies do at times leave behind them—a glove, a handkerchief ;

she might even discover a note, letters, or something of that sort; also at the same time if there was anything to indicate the correctness of Dick's suspicions—that worthy having of late endeavoured to teach her what was the principal plant of a coiner's trade, as far as his somewhat imperfect knowledge on the subject extended. Bells might have rung that morning but they would have rung unheeded, as far as Polly went, until she had finished her inquisition, but after giving an hour's harder work to her search than she had ever bestowed on the dusting of the room, she was fain to confess herself beaten. There was not the slightest vestige of anything that could convict the Doctor of receiving female visitors, or indulging in the manufacture of base silver.

"There is no proof of anything whatsoever. There is nothing but nasty jars and bad smelling bottles. Anyway my notion is better than Dick's. We do know a lady came out of that door—which is more than can be said about a bad half-crown."

Phybbs took care to let Miss Smerdon know that the forbidden chamber was open, and Frances could not resist taking a peep. A few minutes satisfied her. She was in search of nothing, and her idle curiosity was speedily gratified. Jars, bottles, and crucibles were only to be rendered interesting by the Doctor being there to explain what he did with them. Frances indeed was disappointed at not finding drawings of cabalistic figures,

a skull or two, a stuffed alligator, a glass mask, and all the usual paraphernalia with which the workshops of the alchemist or astrologer were garnished, according to the old plays and romances.

Dr. Lynden, as an ordinary chemist, was a very commonplace person, but in those higher walks in which Miss Smerdon pictured him, he was to be regarded with profound respect and veneration. The Doctor's prescience with regard to events in the Crimea had lately induced Miss Smerdon to playfully express her belief that he was an astrologer, and that his prophecies were simply the reading of the stars.

"But," as she said to herself, "there was no telescope, and as for skulls, why, there wasn't even a skull cap."

She felt no further desire to enquire into the mystery of Blue Beard's chamber, unless by the special invitation of the Doctor himself. It was not likely that anything would have come from Constable Tarrant's self-imposed task if he had not been helped by the chapter of accidents. Dick was not at all the man calculated to shine as one of the sleuthhounds of the law. He lacked not only the keen powers of observation, but the untiring watchfulness necessary for a detective. He was a rather stupid, indolent young man, whose idea of hard work was to superintend other people doing it, and especially did he prefer that the said hard work should conduce more or less to his

benefit. He would speedily have wearied of keeping bootless watch and ward over that side door, but for one thing—notwithstanding his compact with Phybbs, Mr. Tarrant had communicated his suspicions to his superiors. They had listened to him half-disdainfully, for they had no faith whatever in his intelligence, but the senior of the two or three officers to whom his tale was told, had almost derisively complimented him, and ordered him to persevere in his vigilance.

“There might be something in it,” said Evans, one of the sharpest officers of the force, when Constable Tarrant had retired. “I don’t suppose there is, it’s hardly likely that a man like Doctor Lynden, moving in the best of society in the place, should be running an illicit mint. Still,” he continued with a grin, “we know the benefits of education and improved machinery. Your tip-toppers don’t live in garrets and slums now-a-days, but on first floors, and dress like swells. Now this gang are real clever, you’ll admit that ; Scotland Yard, you see, is clean beat about them, and say the mintage is inimitable.”

His comrades nodded assent, listening evidently with much respect to Sergeant Evans’ words.

“All this points to its being the work of tip-toppers. Now it’s a curious thing that a man should take a house here, and build out a laboratory with a private stair communicating with the street. They say he’s very clever, and all that ;

but his experiments in chemistry must be for his own amusement. Now there's one grain of truth in what Tarrant says, 'What does he want with a private door all to himself?'"

"Just so," said Inspector Fumard, approvingly.

"If these smashers," continued the Sergeant, "are in Manchester, we must look for them in the least likely places. I'll see if I can make anything out of Dr. Lynden."

If the Doctor has anything to conceal, it will be well for him to take heed. Constable Tarrant he might laugh at, but it is a cat of a very different colour which is now watching the mouse-hole.

That Sergeant Evans should take to either lounging about or walking up and down like a sentry outside the Doctor's door was very unlikely ; but before a week was out he had acquired some information about him which, though it puzzled the Sergeant, convinced him that the Doctor had certainly mysterious avocations. Evans' high position in the Manchester police enabled him to make enquiries which would have been impossible for anyone not so situated. He discovered for one thing, that the Doctor, besides carrying on an extensive correspondence, was in the habit of sending numerous cablegrams to Odessa. This of itself struck him as singular in a gentleman not engaged in trade. What might be the contents of those cablegrams the companies would not have told him if they could, but they did let him

know that they were all couched in cypher, and how this could bear upon coining, the Sergeant was entirely at a loss to conceive.

Another discovery he made which was quite compatible with the doctor being engaged in that illicit pursuit was, that a remarkably lady-like woman was in the habit of strolling from the railway station in the heart of the city out to the suburb wherein the Doctor lived, that though she apparently never noticed the house, she never turned until she had passed it, and that her constant appearance had not attracted the attention of Police-constable Tarrant could be due only to his crass stupidity. Another circumstance which speedily struck the astute Sergeant Evans, was how singularly capricious this lady was in the rose she wore in her bonnet. She dressed so quietly that nothing but a trained eye would have detected this slight but constant variation in her head gear. The rose was sometimes red, sometimes yellow, sometimes white, but to Evans it was speedily as clear as noon day that these were perfectly understood signals to the Doctor. Whenever the rose was red, so surely, as soon as the lady had strolled out of sight, did the Doctor emerge from his house, and follow in the direction she had taken, that the pair met, walked and talked together the Sergeant easily ascertained, and that their interview invariably ended at the railway station from which the lady returned to town. On

the occasions when the rose was of another colour he found that she usually returned from her walk to Manchester and the Doctor made no attempt to follow her. Sergeant Evans was puzzled, but this much did seem clear to him, that the Doctor was in close correspondence with some individual or individuals in town, which correspondence was deemed too important to be entrusted to the post ; that the gang of coiners they were so anxious to pounce upon were artists of the first calibre there was no doubt, but what was the object of this lady-like woman travelling perpetually up and down from London to Manchester merely to exchange a few words with the Doctor either in the streets or at the railway station? Had she carried back parcel or package with her, he could have understood that she was the medium by which the base coin manufactured by the Doctor was transmitted to his associates in town, but she carried nothing with her but a hand bag, and into that he had contrived to obtain a peep which convinced him that it contained nothing in that way.

The Sergeant, in his own vernacular, was fairly "flummoxed."

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORMING OF THE REDAN.

THE eighteenth of June had passed and gone with a result that astonished the Allied army pretty nearly as much as it did Dr. Lynden. After the

Quarries and the Mamelon nobody doubted but that when the assault did take place we should get in ; and that it would take place very shortly was evident. That it would be a pretty tough piece of work it was quite clear. We might not perhaps get possession of the whole place in the first instance, only succeed, perhaps, in capturing the great Redan and the Malakoff; still, that we should be fairly beaten all along the line, and with nothing to show for the terrible loss of life incurred in the assault, except the cemetery taken by Eyre's Brigade, would have been credited by no one ; the cemetery, too, as the men of the left attack contemptuously remarked, they could have taken any night with two companies.

When the news was first flashed beneath the waters to England, you may judge the terror it struck to the hearts of Nell Lynden and her friend. Those first head-lines in the papers spoke only of a general assault on Sebastopol. "Terrible Repulse: Frightful Losses." Bitter lines to women who had those near and dear to them in the Chersonese. Dr. Lynden was always perfectly willing to talk over the successive events of the war with the two girls, but that his daughter had any personal interest in news from the Crimea he had persistently ignored. He had never alluded to her engagement — seemed, indeed, to regard it as a passing fancy which separation had effectually put an end to, and Nell was quite aware that in the

event of the worst she would have to bear her sorrow by herself, that she need expect no sympathy from him. Though fond of his daughter, the Doctor was a hard and proud man, with an iron will under his suave and courteous manner, and he deeply resented the extreme coldness with which Hugh's relations had taken the announcement of the engagement. As for Frances Smerdon, he had no idea that she had any peculiar interest in the march of events. But the terrible list came at last, without any mention of the —th, and when the full accounts, and also a letter from Hugh came to hand, it turned out that the Regiment had been held in reserve, and not engaged at all that day.

"It is very singular," remarked the Doctor, "it upsets all calculation, the first act is not over so soon as I anticipated. Well, they are like cocks in a pit—bound to fight it out—they cannot run away. I am not clear that it is not the best thing that could happen to us. If the Allies did but know it, this tremendous struggle at the extremity of her empire is the most exhausting thing for Russia possible. And when Sebastopol does fall—what next? Ah, then—if Russia could only obtain some compensating success elsewhere—take Paris, for instance, peace might be possible. After swopping queens, Miss Smerdon, one may offer to draw the game."

The siege dragged on. There was no particular action, but incessant skirmishes, and the list of

trench casualties grew perfectly portentous. It was like a running sore on both sides, and cruelly weakening to the two antagonists. The lines of the Allies drew closer and closer round their foe, and it was evident to the keen observer that the Western Powers and the Muscovite must once more speedily close in the death grip. And with the early days of September came the fourth bombardment, which preceded the fall of the famous fortress.

* * * * *

It had been rather a sore subject in the —th that Hugh Fleming had met with no reward for the taking of the Quarries. He had brought the victorious but shattered band back to camp, and the regiment, though proud of the “Well done, —th!” with which their Brigadier had ridden up and congratulated them the next day, were still alike hurt that no honours had been vouched to them in recognition of this their first deed of daring in the Crimea. Poor Grogan’s step had been filled up by the senior subaltern, who happened not to be present in the trenches on that occasion. But that Byng should have had a brevet-majority, and that a company should have been found for Hugh Fleming, the corps was unanimously of opinion. If there was not one vacant in the regiment, there could be no difficulty in finding such a thing just now; every probability, indeed, of there being considerable promotion to bestow very shortly, as it

was pretty generally understood that the assault would take place in the next day or two.

The regiment is for the trenches this night, and Byng and Hugh Fleming are standing in front of the former's tent, watching the storm of shot and shell that is raining down upon the doomed city, and to which the Muscovite still replies sullenly and fiercely, if not quite so vigorously as he did three days ago.

"We shall hear for certain when we get to the brigade grounds," said Byng, "but I should fancy it will come off to-night. This *feu d'enfer* can't go on much longer, we haven't the ammunition for it, we've silenced some of their guns, but it will be a toughish job all the same."

"Yes," replied Fleming, "they are no flinchers, and not likely to give in without hard fighting. Here comes the Adjutant, about to tell you off to some peculiarly delicate piece of work, shouldn't wonder."

"I've just run across, Hugh," said the official in question, "to shake hands and congratulate you on your company, although I'm sorry to say we are going to lose you."

"Lose him!" said Byng. "What on earth do you mean?"

"I've just had a note from a chum of mine, Kenyon, he's on the Head-quarter staff you know, and he tells me that the Quarry Gazette has come, and that Hugh here is transferred to a Lieutenancy

and Captaincy in the Grenadier Guards. You've got your brevet, old man, there are no general orders to night. They are too busy, I suppose, down at Head-quarters, but you'll both be gazetted to-morrow."

"We mean business to-night then?" said Hugh.

"Assault to-morrow, all along the line," replied the Adjutant. "Three rockets from the French rings up the curtain. Once more, congratulations on your promotion, though, as I said before, we shall all be very sorry to lose you."

"Well, I shall have one last turn with the old regiment, anyhow," said Hugh.

"Yes, and a pretty lively one too," said the Adjutant, laughing, "for, from what the brigademajor told me, we are to be in the thick of the fun from the very beginning. However, as far as that goes, I fancy there will be very few left out of the game before it's finished. Ah, there goes the fall in," and all three officers hurried off to the parade-ground in answer to the shrill note of the bugle.

"Well," said Tom, as they walked up and down, "I wonder how you will get on in the Guards? Out here, their life is pretty much the same as ours, but your promotion will most likely take you home, and then you will find soldiering in London very different from soldiering in garrison towns and country quarters."

"But I don't want to go home," said Hugh. "There's a battalion of the Grenadiers out here ;

I suppose I can join that? Why should I be sent home?"

"Because there's a lot of fellows in England dying to come out here; because you've had your chance, and are bound to give some of the others theirs, because you are the junior of your rank, and, like other juniors, must expect to do the dirty work, drill recruits, lick stout young labourers into soldiers, etc."

"By Jove, I never thought of that," rejoined Hugh. "This promotion isn't half as good a thing as I thought it. I'd rather hang on, and get a company in my own regiment."

"Nonsense!" said Byng, laughing. "Pay, promotion, and plunder, are the three things that they say a soldier should never pass when they come in his way. But here comes the chief, fall in."

A few minutes more, and the —th found themselves part of a long, dark column, which was winding like a serpent on its way to the trenches. The heavy roar of the artillery was incessant. Shells whistled and spluttered through the soft summer night, the air seemed alive with meteors, and every now and then a heavy thud, followed by an angry explosion that burst close to the winding column, and the sudden stumbling of two or three men, proved the messenger of death had been launched only too successfully. The advanced trenches were gradually crammed with men, and bitterly did the chiefs of the reserves deplore the

lack of one or more sheltered *places d'armes* wherein they might bestow their men. That the Russians, after all these months of practice, should have got the range of pretty well every part of our lines it is easy to imagine, but fortunately the pitching a shell from a distance with accuracy into a ditch, which is what a trench virtually is, is a task that tries the powers of the most expert Artilleryman. But where the trench expanded into a battery, it was very different. There the Muscovite had a bigger target to aim at, and the men who served the guns suffered terribly during the concluding months of the siege. All through the night roared the thunderous cannonade on both sides, the air hissed and hurtled with the savage missiles, while in the crowded trenches pulses beat high, and men strained their eyes in search of the first grey streaks which should herald the coming day.

"Daylight," said Byng, pointing to the sky.

"Now for it," muttered many an anxious lip, and with ears erect men awaited the sharp word of command from their chiefs, and the shrill call of the bugle. Neither came, and slowly the word ran through the trenches that there would be no assault until the Artillerymen had had some hours' pounding at the Russian lines. Our foes had taught our leaders a lesson, and shown that much as our guns might knock their defences about in the daytime, their power of restoring those defences by night was almost magical. If the fire

raged furiously all night, it was a very storm of shot and shell now that the sun was up and the gunners on each side had a fair sight of their opponent's batteries. The sun was high in the heavens, yet still went on the constant roar and crash of cannon and mortar, and still no signal came for the assault. It was near noon when suddenly three rockets leaped high in the air, and a crash of musketry notified that the French had opened the ball on the right. "Forward the stormers," cried the General commanding the attack. "Forward," cried the Colonels of the leading regiments. "Away there the ladder party," shouted an officer of Engineers. The bugles rang out the charge. "Forward —th," shouted Hugh Fleming, as he and Byng sprang over the parapet, and dashed forward at a steady double straight for the salient of the great Redan, while the very heavens resounded with the sharp rattle of musketry from all sides. The *abattis* was broken rapidly by the Sappers in three or four places, but even that momentary delay occasioned fearful havoc in the ranks of the assailants, while the Russian batteries now swept the space between their own lines and the British right attack with a murderous cross fire of grape and canister. Still they pressed on, dauntless as ever, though now at every step a man pitched forward and rolled over. What is left of the two leading regiments, the sailors and Sappers, have gained the ditch of the Redan.

Byng sprang into the ditch, closely followed by his men; two or three of the Engineers promptly raised a ladder; he rushed towards it and a terrible malediction escaped his lips as he discovered that it was too short. A little to his right Hugh Fleming has been more fortunate, and having cleared a space by the free use of his revolver has gained the parapet. His men swarm up after him. A sharp hand-to-hand fight, and the salient of the Redan is won! Up other ladders their comrades pour to their assistance, and slowly but steadily the foe is driven back to the gorge of the work.

But where are the reinforcements? They have room now to use plenty of men if they had them, but they are too weak in numbers to follow their foe further than they have already driven him. This the enemy is not slow to perceive; he rallies and stands his ground. The opposing parties pause, and glare at each other like pugilists between the rounds, when the battle is far from foughten out. But there is this terrible difference between them; whereas no reinforcements are reaching the English, they are steadily pouring in to the Russians.

The gallant Colonel who leads the stormers is beside himself with vexation. He has won the work—is he to lose it, and all the lives it has cost him be wasted in vain? Messenger after messenger he dispatches in search of those sorely-needed reinforcements, but they never come back.

“Look here!” he said, addressing a small knot

of officers who had temporarily gathered near the parapet, "do I look as if I was in a funk?"

"Not a bit more than the rest of us, sir," promptly replied a captain of the Light Division.

"Well, he continued, "reinforcements I must have if I am to hold this work. I've sent four messengers for them, not one of them has returned nor have the reinforcements come. Now, gentlemen, I'm going myself, and if anything happens to me, I trust to you to do justice to my memory, and testify that I didn't go into that infernal cross-fire because *I was afraid*," and in another moment he had leapt over the parapet and was gone.

He did not share the fate of his messengers, but like them, he never returned. Before he could obtain the reinforcements he went for, the Russians had swept the English out of the Redan and driven them back pell-mell to their own trenches.

It was the lull before the storm ; the officers took advantage of the respite to reform and steady their men, to slip fresh cartridges into their revolvers, and generally to brace themselves for the coming struggle. They could see fresh troops pouring in to the assistance of their opponents, they knew that the strife between them must be renewed in a few minutes, and unless aid came to them, and that soon, they knew well what the result of that strife must be. Not a man wavered, not a cheek blanched, they knew what they had to do—to hold that work as long as they could and then die.

The pause is soon over ; cheered on by their officers, and exultant in their replenished numbers with a wild yell, the Russians once more hurl themselves on the foe ; dauntlessly are they met, and one of those savage hand-to-hand mêlées in which men's eyes, like the Chourineur's in Sue's famous novel, see blood, ensues. Bayonet thrusts, and furious blows with clubbed muskets, are exchanged on all sides. In the midst of this very whirlpool of battle Private Phybbs, still sticking close to Hugh's heels with the canine fidelity he had displayed during the entire morning, found himself immersed. The confused mass swayed backwards and forwards when suddenly there came a final rush on the part of the Muscovites, and by sheer weight of numbers, the English were driven rapidly back. Peter Phybbs was doing his *devoir* gallantly in the fray, when just as this retrograde movement began, his foot slipped on the blood-stained soil, and at the same moment, he received a blow from the butt-end of a musket on the shoulder, which brought him to the ground. Another moment, and the bayonet of a powerful Russian Grenadier would have terminated the career of the luckless soldier, when a bullet from Hugh's revolver stretched the Grenadier across the legs of his intended victim. For a few moments Fleming made a gallant stand and, with the aid of his death-dealing revolver, kept his foes at bay. At length, hurling the empty pistol furiously in

their faces, he was about to fall back, when a bayonet thrust in his side caused him to reel backwards, and before he could recover himself he was in the fierce grip of his foremost foes. Short had been his shrift, perhaps, for the blood of his assailants was up, and they had seen two or three of their comrades fall by his hand, but luckily for Hugh, one of their officers was close by, and sternly commanded that his life should be spared. But to this, having fainted from loss of blood, Hugh was utterly oblivious.

If those few moments have cost Hugh Fleming his life, they have undoubtedly saved that of Peter Phybbs. But for Hugh's revolver, his spirit would have already sped, but Fleming's stand had enabled him to recover his feet, rejoin his comrades, and be with them swept over the parapet by the victorious wave of Russian troops. As for the broken and defeated remnant of the English, they tumbled pell-mell into the ditch of the Redan, as Tom Byng described it afterwards, "like detected schoolboys over an orchard wall," and made their way back to their own lines by twos and threes, and without any attempt at formation. If they had strewn the ground thick as leaves in Autumn, during their advance, it is certain that they suffered but little in their retreat. Whether the Russian batteries deemed it probable that their troops, following up the success they had gained, might make a sortie in force, or whether they

chivalrously abstained from further punishment of a thoroughly beaten foe, I cannot say, but so it was, and both Byng and Private Phybbs were amongst those who regained the advanced trench comparatively unhurt. Over Hugh Fleming's fate his comrades could only shake their heads sadly when they got back to the camp. He had never been seen after that last charge of the Russians, which had swept them out of the Redan, and in all probability he was numbered with the slain. It seemed to his comrades the very irony of fate to read in the general orders for the army that evening :

“Lieutenant Hugh Fleming, —th Regiment, to be Lieutenant and Captain in the Grenadier Guards. Captain Fleming will report himself at once to the Quarter-Master General regarding a passage for England.”

CHAPTER XV.

MISSING.

THE mid-day storm of carnage is over. That we have been beaten at the Redan is well-known, and all attempt to take that work is for the present abandoned. The perpetual rattle of musketry confirms the report that the French have got the Malakoff, and are still fighting hard in the Karabelnaya suburb to retain it. What we are to do next is canvassed on all sides—both in the trenches

and out of them ; both among those in the advance and those in the reserve.

As Tom Byng pithily expresses it — “ It’s not likely we are going to take a devil of a licking like this quietly ; more especially as those French fellows have got in. Kicked out, by Jove, is the only way I can describe our leaving the Redan ! ”

The artillery duel *à outrance* seems to have been tacitly abandoned for the present. Like two dogs that have fought, both sides seem engaged in licking their wounds and catching their breath, preparatory to renewing the combat ; only that spattering fire in the Karabelnaya suburb tells that the foe still clings to the hope of ousting the French from the Malakoff. So at least was his pertinacious resistance in that part construed by the Allies. Subsequent events showed that even the gallant Todleben at last recognised that the game was up, and that the struggle was only prolonged until darkness should cover the retreat.

Sunset came at last, and with it the reliefs for those who had spent the last weary hours in the trenches. The Russians somewhat renewed their cannonade for the next two or three hours, then it suddenly died away, only to be succeeded by some loud explosions within their works.

“ That sounds deuced like blowing up their magazines,” said an officer of the Engineers, in the advanced trench. “ One explosion might have been an accident, but not two. I say Campbell,”

he continued, turning to an officer of Highlanders who stood by, "the Redan has been awfully quiet for some time. Let's go up and see if there's anybody in it."

The two officers accordingly dropped quietly over the parapet and stole through the darkness towards the work from which our people had been driven pell-mell in the morning. All was still as death. Slowly they picked their way amongst the dying and the dead across that grape-swept plateau until they reached the *abattis*. The Russian lines were perfectly mute, save now and again for a gun from a distant battery, or a slight spattering exchange of musketry with the French in the rear of the Malakoff.

"We'll crawl up as close as they will let us," whispered Campbell.

The Engineer nodded assent, and the two crept on cautiously until they reached the very ditch of the Redan. There they lay down and listened. After a pause of two or three minutes, during which no sound came from the interior of the work, the Engineer whispered :

"It is empty ; we'll just stay here a little longer to make sure, and then go back with our news."

Five minutes elapsed, and still the same unbroken quiet ; after the awful turmoil of the last four days, the silence seemed perfectly weird-like. The two adventurers made their way rapidly back to the advance of the right attack, and at once

communicated their discovery to the General commanding there. A small council of war was held upon the advisability of at once seizing upon the abandoned work, but the wary veteran who commanded quickly closed the discussion with the remark, "If it's empty now we shall find it empty in the morning, and if it happens to be mined, it will probably be blown up by then." And it was well he so decided, for about daybreak a tremendous explosion emphatically announced that the work was empty, while the three or four explosions which speedily followed proclaimed that the Russians had blown up their magazines, and retreating across the harbour had abandoned the south side of Sebastopol.

By day-break the next morning it was known all through the lines of the Allies that the siege was over, and that the celebrated fortress had at length fallen. In the course of the day many officers and soldiers entered the town, having passed the chain of cavalry vedettes, now spread across the approaches to prevent their entrance, the Chiefs of the army still fearing there might be mines left not yet exploded, which produced the following sarcastic remark from Mr. Flinn — "the divvil such a place iver I heard of. It's harder a dale to get into than Heaven. Here's first the Russians wouldn't let us in, and now begorra, our own General won't let us pass. It ought to be a mighty pleasant place inside, for those that's in it

seem mighty anxious to keep it to themselves. It's a murdering mistake I made when I listed, after all the months we've been taking it, to think we mayn't even look at it." Some few days had elapsed since Sebastopol had fallen and still no tidings could the —th get of Hugh Fleming. The last man who could positively speak of seeing him in the Redan was Phybbs, who was never tired of narrating the story of the part he took in the *mêlée*, of how his foot slipped, how Captain Fleming came to his rescue, and how the last he saw of him he was in the midst of a crowd of Russians. "And he saved my life he did," he would invariably conclude in his rather boyish treble, which was apt, taken in conjunction with his undeveloped physique, to make his auditors wonder why he was sent out for such rough work. One or two hospitals had been discovered inside the town, the beds tenanted by the dead and hopelessly wounded; hospitals too in dire condition, as was likely after having been filled to excess during that last terrible bombardment and then hastily abandoned. One English officer it was true was found therein alive, mortally wounded and delirious, whom death soon relieved from his suffering, but there was no trace of Hugh Fleming. One only hope had Tom Byng and his comrades, he was not amongst the killed found in the Redan, or on the plateau outside, and it was little likely the Russians had carried him off unless he had

been alive. Still it was an extraordinary thing that no letter came from him, if he was a prisoner. Officers, under those circumstances generally wrote, not only to relieve the anxiety of their friends, but for such necessities as money, clothes, etc. Then, as far as they could, each side helped the other to complete the list of their casualties. But of Captain Fleming there was no mention.

If there had been anxious moments about the eighteenth of June at Manchester, you may judge what the feelings of the two girls were when the wire flashed home the news, and the various papers announced in their largest type: "The Fall of Sebastopol," knowing as they did too well the terrible postscript that had to follow. Had it been possible Nell would have telegraphed at once to the regiment for reliable information, but the submarine cable was reserved altogether for official despatches, as indeed was absolutely necessary. There were too many people at home who in their solicitude for friends and relatives in the Crimea would have used that cable regardless of expense; wealthy people too at that time would have spent money freely only to have had the very latest news from the Crimea. No war we have engaged in since has excited such feverish interest in England, until we come to the dramatic story of Wolseley's splendid dash across the desert to Khartoum, with its desperate fighting and sad death roll—all ending in that melancholy wail, "Too late!"

That it was a terribly anxious time for Nell Lynden may be easily believed, and one thing that puzzled her much was, for the first time she did not know where her lover might be. When she had last heard from him he was doing duty as usual with the —th, but Miss Lynden had seen that gazette in which Hugh was promoted into the Grenadier Guards, even a little before it reached the Crimea. Her father, whose knowledge of the British army was as accurate as if he had passed some years of his life in it, and was familiar with all the details thereof, in reply to her questioning had informed her that an officer's promotion from one regiment to another involved his joining the regiment he was promoted to ; that Captain Fleming would therefore join the Guards ; and that the Guards, in consequence of the terrible punishment they had endured at Inkermann and their sufferings during the winter, had been so reduced that they had been sent down to Balaklava and placed in reserve. Miss Lynden therefore clung to the fond hope that her lover was not actively engaged upon this occasion.

“ He has done enough, Frances, I'm sure ; and if he is only safe I'm sure it cannot signify his not being with the old regiment this time.”

To which Miss Smerdon made no reply. She could only think that the man who despised her, the man whom she never meant to see again, but whom, alas ! she still loved, was still at the front.

Ah, was he still at the front? And then the tears came into her eyes and she thought what wouldn't she give, even to know that much.

Dr. Lynden showed an indifference about the return lists that made the two girls perfectly furious. As Miss Smerdon said :

"We don't expect our fathers to take quite the same interest in our lovers that we do ourselves, but darling Nell, your father really might have some little feeling for those he knew fairly well, such a few months ago."

The lives of the combatants in the eyes of Dr. Lynden were as the loss of so many pawns in the game, save and except it should happen to be that of some combatant of mark. But as he had already said there were no Napoleons nowadays, and there was only one man engaged in the struggle whose value the Doctor appraised at a very high standard, and that was the intrepid Engineer who had so long defended Sebastopol. The Doctor's mind at present was busy with conjectures as to where the second act would take place.

"As for the north side," he would say, "it's perfectly immaterial. I don't suppose the Russians care whether we have it or they; their fleet is sunk, we shall destroy their arsenal, blow in their docks, and Sebastopol is a thing of the past — *c'est fini*."

But the grim returns are cabled home at last. And the two girls glance eagerly through the list

until they come to the —th. The regiment was engaged quite as hotly as it had previously been in the Quarries, but fortune had favoured it on this occasion, and it had suffered far less severely both in officers and men. Two of the former only were wounded, and it was with a sense of intense relief that they saw no mention of the names of either Byng or Fleming. Then they turned to the general account of the capture of the place, of which, though the reports were as yet meagre, there were still quite sufficient to make one long to learn the whole story of the finish of the great drama which had been so long enacted before it. Suddenly Miss Smerdon, who was now in entire possession of the paper, uttered a low cry, and gasped out :

“ Oh, Nell, Nell, my darling, I am so sorry for you.”

Frances' eye had once more reverted to the list of killed and wounded, and at the bottom of this she saw what had before escaped their eyes—

“ We regret to say that Captain Fleming, of the Grenadier Guards, is among the missing.”

Nell Lynden turned very white, and her lips twitched a little ; but, more habituated to self-control than her emotional friend, she only held out her hand, and said quietly, though her voice shook a little :

“ Give me the paper.”

Placing her finger on the fatal line, Frances handed it to her in silence.

For a moment Nell gazed at the paragraph half-vacantly, as one who did not understand its meaning, and this in truth she did not. She was trying to think what "missing" meant. Why did they not know where he was? If he were killed, if he were wounded, surely someone must know. Could it mean that he was a prisoner? No, hardly that, she thought; since Inkermann it had so rarely happened that officers had been made prisoners on either side, not from any barbarous reasons of refusing quarter, but simply it had happened so.

"What does it mean?" she asked, at last.

But Miss Smerdon could only reply, with tears, that she did not know, and "missing" must mean "missing."

Then Nell reflected what her father had told her, that Hugh would at once have to join his new regiment; and again she glanced at the brief story of the assault contained in the paper she held in her hand. Yes, her father was right, it mentioned that the Guards and Highlanders, though marched up to the front, had been held in reserve during the 8th of September. It must be a mistake; the next mail would probably bring a letter from Hugh, and make her laugh over her fears. Surely, after preserving him through so much danger, God could not be so cruel as to take her lover from her on the last day of that terrible siege. She never reflected that such sorrow must be the lot of

many a woman in England who had read the returns that day.

But that next mail brought no letter from Hugh and then, heart-sick with terrible anxiety, Nell Lynden wrote for news to Major Byng. She had nerved herself now for the worst. She knew some disaster must have befallen Hugh, or he would never have failed to scrawl a note after such a battle as the last. She shed no tears; she made no outward moan; she even shrank from speculating over Hugh's probable fate with her friend. But her face wore that look of sternly repressed trouble which is far more touching in a woman than lamentation and tears. As for these latter, Frances in her sympathy shed quite enough, one might indeed have supposed that Hugh was her lover instead of only her friend's. But the next mail brought a letter from the Crimea to Miss Lynden, directed in a hand which, though she failed to recognise, brought the blood to Miss Smerdon's temples when she saw it.

"DEAR MISS LYNDEN," it ran.

"Knowing exactly how things stand between you and Hugh Fleming, I feel sure you will be distressed at not hearing from him last mail. I have waited to write to you till this in the hope that I might have good news to send and set your mind at ease. But I am very, very sorry to say that we know nothing of Hugh nor of what has

befallen him. He took a last turn with the old regiment on the 8th, and was one of the foremost into the Redan. He was there during the whole of that bitter struggle which resulted, as the papers no doubt have already told you, in our being kicked out, solely for want of reinforcements. I saw him and spoke to him myself several times during the fight inside that work, but the last man as far as we can make out who actually saw him was a private soldier called Peter Phybbs, who declares that he was then fighting desperately with half-a-dozen Russians. He is a protégé of your own, Miss Lynden, says that he is a brother of your maid, and that Hugh saved his life that day. I have told him to write a full account of it all to his sister, thinking that he will write to her with far less restraint than if I told him to address yourself. I can only say that Hugh's fate at present is involved in mystery. He certainly was not amongst the killed or wounded found in the Redan and round it. He was not in the hospitals at Sebastopol which the Russians were compelled to abandon in their retreat, and I still don't despair of his once more turning up. The obvious conclusion one ought to come to is that he has been taken prisoner, but to be quite candid with you it is singular in that case that we have not heard from him, as the enemy always allow a prisoner to write to his friends and give particulars of his misfortune. Still the exigencies of their sudden retreat may

have prevented all this. Deeply regretting I have nothing more satisfactory to tell you, and pledging myself to write as soon as ever I receive tidings of Hugh.

“Yours very sincerely,

“THOMAS BYNG

“Camp before Sebastopol, Sept. 14th.”

CHAPTER XVI.

POLLY CHANGES HER MIND.

SERGEANT EVANS is getting extremely interested in the study of Dr. Lynden's life. He is very doubtful as to coining being the Doctor's vocation ; he would not as yet say positively that it was not so, but he certainly did not much believe that he was engaged in that. As for the lady of the roses she seemed at present to almost live upon the railway between Manchester and London. She was more capricious as to the colour of the roses in her bonnet than ever, but she was still constant to that mode of decoration. So faithful was she to her walks in the direction of the Doctor's house that they soon attracted the attention of Miss Phybbs. She recognised the lady in an instant, and noticed the perpetual change of colour in the rose in her head-gear, nearly as quickly as the detective had done. As for Constable Tarrant, unless he had seen the lady come out of the side door it would never have occurred to him that it

was odd her walking so continually in that direction. In short, Police-Constable Tarrant was by this heartily sick of the whole thing, and would long since have given up keeping his eye on the Doctor but for the commands of his superiors. There was very little perseverance about Richard Tarrant, and advantage must accrue speedily to induce him to stick to any pursuit. At present his watch was of a very perfunctory nature and, so far, had only been rewarded by his seeing some one or two men go in and out of the side door, whose status it would have been rather difficult to decide about. The Doctor indeed had fairly baffled his inquisitors, and though weeks, even months, had elapsed since Tarrant first decided that an eye must be kept upon him, he and Phybbs had learnt but very little. Sergeant Evans, albeit a skilled detective, had learnt little more, and though still pursuing the inquiry, was doing it now with no expectation of discovering crime, but more because the elucidation of the problem piqued him. To the Sergeant, a mystery he could not penetrate had all the fascination that a stiff double acrostic has for some people.

One morning, about the end of September, when Miss Smerdon came down to breakfast, she was surprised to notice signs of agitation in her usually calm, self-possessed young hostess, which she at once concluded were caused by news from the Crineia. She timidly ventured to express as much,

for Frances lived in dread that all this stern repression must end in a frightful burst of feeling whenever the cruel news did come. Of Hugh Fleming's fate there were no tidings. No letter came from Byng ; the papers regretted ever and anon that no intelligence had come to hand regarding the missing officer, and spoke in a hopeless fashion of his ever being heard of again alive.

Miss Smerdon herself had little doubt that if ever Hugh Fleming was discovered it would be amongst the ruins and *débris* of the captured town, and, alas ! probably only to be recognised by his uniform. However, Miss Lynden assured her that it was nothing of the kind, still there was a slight embarrassment perceptible in Nell's manner which caused Frances to wonder what had disturbed her equanimity. Dr. Lynden, not an unusual thing with him, was absent at breakfast. At length Miss Lynden said, "I hope you won't think me very rude and inhospitable, Frances, if I ask you to go home at very short notice. The truth is, my father has just received news that obliges him to leave this at once, and he wishes to take me with him."

Frances was not a little surprised, but at once replied :

"Of course I will, I'll go to-day if I can. I've paid an unconscionable visit ; it has been very good of you indeed to bear with me for the last three months."

"No, no, it isn't that," said Miss Lynden, "I

don't want you to go to-day, and above all I must ask you to say nothing about your going till to-morrow morning. You got no letters to-day, remember ; to-morrow I will take care you receive one. It will be your excuse for so suddenly returning home. I am awfully sorry, Frances, and I know I am seeming very unkind, but I can't help it. Papa says we must go, and I know no more about it."

"Not another word, Nell, I'm sorry to leave, very sorry to leave you in your sore trouble, and you were so good to me in mine. You say but little, still, I can see how you suffer, one doesn't speak of such things. You know my secret—well, I never said anything more to you about it, and am not going to now. All is over between us, but thank God, he is safe. Ah, if we could only hear the same of Hugh Fleming."

Miss Lynden's stoical composure somewhat gave way, and it was in unsteady tones that she replied :

"We must both wait and hope, Frances, for I have a firm conviction that your love affair will all come right in the end."

Miss Smerdon shook her head, though a thrill of exultation shot through her breast at the suggestion.

"As for me," continued the girl, "I must still hope, though judging from what I see here," and she pointed to the paper, "I am hoping against hope."

It was rather a melancholy day that last. It was

not likely that conversation between the two friends could be anything but of the most sombre description. Each felt that in leaving Manchester they were cutting themselves off from all direct intelligence from the Crimea, and would have to depend for their news on the daily papers. Miss Lynden, it is true, might write to Major Byng, but she had now no address to give him. When she enquired of her father as to where letters were to be forwarded to them, he replied sharply :

“We shall have no address for the present. You have not very many correspondents, and you had better let them know that such is the case. Anything that arrives here will have to remain till our return, which is a very indefinite period. I shall be busy all day in the laboratory ; remember we start to-morrow early.”

Although the two girls strictly conformed to the Doctor's injunctions and made no allusion to their approaching departure before Phybbs, yet they naturally commenced preparations for their different journeys. It was not to be supposed that these escaped the observation of the lynx-eyed Polly, who was sorely exercised in her mind as to what it behoved her to do upon this occasion. Their all going away without saying a word to anyone she felt quite certain Dick would look upon as suspicious. She could not but admit it was, herself ; she did not believe that the Doctor was engaged in coining, or in any nefarious transaction, but then the police

did, or else why had they told Dick to keep an eye upon him? And Constable Tarrant had taken care, with a good deal of swagger and conceit, to inform her that that was the case. He forgot to mention that with a view of showing his own intelligence he had told his superiors that he had made up to one of the servant girls in the house, and that nothing took place in the Doctor's residence of which he was not informed. Sergeant Evans placed very little confidence in his subordinate, but he certainly under those circumstances did not think the Doctor could make any preparations for departure without its coming to his knowledge. He had no reason to suppose that the Doctor had any intention of levanting, and as we know was now continuing his investigation more from curiosity than from any belief that he was engaged in felonious pursuits.

Phybbs' breast was torn with conflicting emotions. Suppose the police should prove right after all, and that after his escape the Doctor should turn out to be a felon who through her connivance had slipped through their fingers? What would Dick say to her? He would declare that his chance had come, that the opportunity of giving valuable information to his superiors had been his, and that, thanks to her keeping what she knew to herself, he had missed it. Then what did this hurried departure mean? If the Doctor was carrying on an intrigue, and had finally made up his mind to

run away with the lady of the roses, he certainly would not take his daughter with him—no, she supposed the police must be right, women constantly stood in the dock along with men, the lady of the roses was probably only a confederate in crime, she was sorry for her master, but she had a public duty to perform. And then came the practical part of the argument, that if she failed to do it, Dick would give her a pretty hard time. Yes, she would ask for leave to go out for an hour that evening, slip down and see Dick, and tell him what she knew.

Something occurred that afternoon which entirely changed Polly's resolve, and that was the arrival of the Crimean mail, bringing a letter for Miss Phybbs, c/o Dr. Lynden, etc., etc., and as she looked at it, Polly recognised her brother's caligraphy. It was not very often she heard from him, for, although Peter was a fairly expert penman, soldiers in the field have not much facility for letter-writing. If Polly had not been quite as anxious as the young ladies, she had certainly felt very uneasy and uncomfortable when news came of desperate fighting in the Chersonese. She was fond of her brother, and a housemaid and her mistress feel pretty much alike on these occasions. She had not heard from him since the 8th of September, but regarded him as safe, as his name did not figure among the returns of the —th on that day.

Miss Lynden was naturally of a reticent disposition, and in the agony of her own grief had never

told Polly what she had learnt from Byng's letter. Miss Phybbs felt satisfied that her brother was safe, but she had no idea that he owed his life to anything but the fortune of war. Peter's letter told her the whole story.

It is not worth producing, but the following extract will give Private Phybbs' idea of his share in the day.

"Well, Polly, you see, I've been shot at a good deal in the trenches since I've been out, but this was my first go in at the Rooshuns, real hand-to-hand, and if I don't know what fighting means now, I never shall. Some of the old soldiers say it was as hot as ever they seed it. It was just about mid-day when we got the order to go and take the Redan. I made up my mind to stick close to the Captain. He had been very good to me ever since I came out, and as I reckoned we were all bound to be killed, I thought we might as well be killed together. How we got across the open I don't know. Men went down like skittles, but somehow nothing touched the Captain and me, and the next I know was we were in the ditch of the Redan, and the Captain going up a ladder like a squirrel. Well, we blundered up the ladder after him as we best could; he must have cleared the way a bit for us, for I know I had time to get down into the work before I was hand-to-hand with the Rooshuns. We was at it hammer and tongs then for I don't know

how long ; every now and then we'd stop for a bit, and then go at it again worse than ever ; but, you see, they kept on getting more men and we didn't, and so we was bound to be licked in the end. After we had been fighting for ever so long, they made a great rush. My foot slipped, down I went, and it would have been all over with me then and there if the Captain hadn't cut in and fought the lot of 'em while I got up again.

"Well, I can't tell you much more about it. They were too many for us. The last I saw of the Captain he was in the middle of a lot of Rooshuns fighting like a madman. It ain't no use, Polly, saying I ought to have gone back and helped him, I couldn't, none of us could, they drove us back and bundled us over the parapet neck and crop, and very lucky for those that were bundled over the parapet, those that were not were killed and wounded. I heard the Adjutant say it was bad enough, but we'd got out of it cheap considering, but the worst of it is, we can hear nothing of Captain Fleming. They can't find him, dead or alive, and I think he must be a prisoner, though it's very odd none of the officers have heard from him.

"Please give my duty to Miss Lynden, and say if it hadn't been for the note she gave me, I should have never written you this."

The perusal of this letter caused a complete reversal of Polly's plans. How could she hand the father over to the police, when the daughter's lover

had saved her brother's life, and, as it seemed to Polly, at her young mistress' intervention? No, it was a sore struggle, but if Dick should upbraid her on the one hand, what on the other should she say to her brother if it should turn out that her treachery had delivered Dr. Lynden into the clutches of the law?

The first thing Miss Phybbs did was to rush breathlessly to the drawing-room, and with flushed face pour forth her gratitude to her young mistress for the note she had given her, then to place her brother's letter in Miss Lynden's hand, and then to subside into helpless confusion as the thought flashed across her that the letter carried no comfort to her mistress but only recalled her own sorrow to her mind. Nellie flushed a little as she remembered how she had forgotten to tell Polly all this before. But the two ladies really were much interested in the account Private Phybbs gave of the assault on the Redan, although it was not exactly news to them.

Dismissed with a few kindly words Polly had no longer any doubt of the course she should pursue. She would not lift a finger in the interests of the police. If Dr. Lynden had urgent reasons for getting out of the way she most certainly would not mar his plans. She could only hope, for his own sake, that the police were mistaken, but she should require neither bonnet nor shawl that evening.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LYNDENS LEVANT.

ALTHOUGH Polly Phybbs herself was not surprised, her fellow servants were, when immediately after post time Miss Lynden announced that she and Dr. Lynden were going up to Town for some days. Miss Phybbs, cognisant of the preparations that were going on the day before, was quite prepared for this, but what she was not prepared for, was that Nellie, in accordance with her father's instructions, should not only pay up their wages but further a quarter in advance, and that when, the cabs being at the door, she ventured to ask her mistress where letters were to be forwarded to, Miss Lynden should reply that such letters as might come could wait, that their plans were still unformed, and that she would let her know where to forward them as soon as they were settled.

At the station they separated, Miss Smerdon returning to Monmouthshire, and the Doctor and his daughter taking a train to London. Frances was really very much distressed at parting with her friend, she did not understand it at all, but she had a vague idea that something dreadful had happened and that there was more trouble in store for Nell Lynden. Of what description she could not con-

jecture, but what could be the meaning of this sudden and mysterious journey? Nell herself had said more than once that she neither knew why nor where they were going, and then Miss Smerdon's thoughts wandered, as they were rather given to do, off to the Crimea, and she wondered after all if it were possible that that was their destination. Could it be that the Doctor, moved by the trouble in his daughter's face, had suddenly determined to take her out to the East, and see if they could discover what had become of Hugh Fleming? Dr. Lynden, she knew, was an excellent linguist, not only perfectly *au courant* with the Continent but also with singularly comprehensive knowledge of the Chersonese and adjoining countries. Had he been only more sympathetic on the subject of Nell's engagement, she would have felt certain that was the solution of the mystery, but he had always shown himself so utterly indifferent to it that, only Nell had assured her to the contrary, she would have thought him unaware that it existed. He hardly ever mentioned Fleming's name, and then it was in quite as casual a manner as that of any other of the officers of the regiment he had known during their stay in Manchester.

"No," thought Frances, "the Doctor's very wise and very clever, he's fond of Nell in his way and he's very kind to me. But he's as selfish an old thing as ever I met with, and it's my private conviction that he not only wouldn't care, but he'd

rather prefer not to see Hugh Fleming again. He's an active and energetic man enough, and if he seems to live a lazy life at Manchester, it's not from natural indolence, but I don't think he'd make a pilgrimage to find Hugh Fleming, and if it is not that, what on earth is it? The thing that seems to interest him most, now that hostilities have virtually ceased in the Crimea, is where they are to commence again. How I wish I knew what they were all about out there. If one could but see what they were all doing." And then Miss Smerdon became guiltily conscious that this general anxiety about the doings of the Crimean army was a rather garbled statement of her desires; and that what Major Byng might be about, and what had become of Hugh Fleming, would have amply satisfied her curiosity.

"My darling Nell," she murmured, "I do trust things will all come right in the end for you; but it will be dreadful not to hear from you—not even to know where you are."

The day after the Doctor's departure Police-constable Tarrant was informed, previous to going on duty, that he was wanted in the chief office. Police-constable Tarrant prepared to obey the summons with no little discomposure. His interviews with his superiors so far had generally resulted in somewhat sharp strictures upon his conduct, and he felt dubious as to whether commendation was likely to be his lot upon this

occasion. However, in compliance with the order he made his way thither, and found the Chief Constable and Sergeant Evans sitting in conclave.

"Tarrant," said the Chief, "your instructions have been for some time past to keep an eye upon Dr. Lynden's house. Have you anything special to report concerning it?"

"Nothing," replied Dick. "I've mentioned that two or three suspicious characters had gone in at that very suspicious side door during the last month."

"Yes," replied the Chief; "quite so, you mentioned that," and here he threw a significant glance at Sergeant Evans. "By the way, you weren't on the beat yesterday?"

"No, sir," rejoined Dick.

"That wouldn't matter much to Tarrant, sir," remarked Evans, with an amused though wicked look in his eyes. "He has exceptional means of knowing all that goes on in that house. Never mind, my man," he continued, as Dick looked apprehensively at the Chief and evidently waxed very uncomfortable, "I'm not going to betray confidences, men of the world don't talk of these little affairs. The day before yesterday you were on duty there—you neither heard of nor noticed anything unusual going on in the family?"

"No," was the reply.

"That will do, Tarrant," said the sergeant suavely, "you can't do better than continue to keep an eye upon Dr. Lynden's, and I shouldn't wonder if we

had to take you on the detective staff before long,' and there was a ring of irony in the concluding sentence that penetrated even Dick's armour of conceit.

Police-constable Tarrant felt an uncomfortable conviction that there was something wrong somewhere, and as he started for his beat, resolved to call at the house and tell Polly he must see her. By the time he had carried out his intention the Doctor had been gone four-and-twenty hours. Miss Phybbs opened the door for him in person, and started with no little dismay upon seeing who the visitor was. She knew that it must come, and she had made up her mind to break it, but she felt sure that Dick would be very angry that he had not been informed of the Doctor's departure yesterday. She was a plucky and a high-spirited young woman till it came to confronting her cousin Dick, but when he railed at her she would merely hang her head and make no reply. What she saw in him—why she should bear tamely from him what she would stand from no one else, was inexplicable to all her friends; but it can only be said it was so. After all there is nothing new in it. Clever and pretty women from time immemorial for reasons inscrutable have allowed themselves to be bullied by mean and contemptible men.

"How are you, Polly?" said Dick. "You must manage to slip out for half-an-hour as soon as you can. I want to talk to you badly."

"Well, Dick, you can talk here as well as anywhere. Won't you come in? There's nobody at home."

"What do you mean?" asked Dick, with eyes open wide from astonishment. "You don't mean I'm to come in, do you?"

He had never ventured yet to cross the Doctor's threshold.

"Yes, I do. They are all gone away—they went away yesterday morning," said Polly, setting her face hard in anticipation of the storm that was coming.

"Gone away!" thundered Dick. "What's the use of your keeping an eye on them I should like to know, if you allow them to go away?"

"Why, how could I prevent it?"

"Prevent, indeed!" said the now angry Tarrant. "Why, they couldn't go away without your seeing them, I suppose. Wasn't it clearly your duty to communicate with me? You don't suppose the law would allow them to go away, do you?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Polly meekly. "They told us suddenly yesterday morning that they were going to Town, and in two or three hours they went. They kept me pretty busy too, all the time. How was I to let you know?"

It could hardly be expected that Polly would own that she had been pretty well convinced of their intentions twenty-four hours before that.

"Bah!" returned Constable Tarrant. "I'm dis-

gusted with you. I looked upon you as a gal with gumption, and any gal with gumption would have known they were going away long before. But that's the way with all you women. You're all idleness, vanity and conceit. Instead of keeping your eye on the Doctor you were keeping it on your looking-glass. Instead of thinking of my interests you were thinking about the colour of your bonnet strings."

"Indeed, Dick—indeed, they gave us no notice," said the girl, pleadingly.

"Oh, go away ; it just makes me sick. All the men I used to read about when I was at school was always brought to grief by women. Now you've just gone and ruined my prospects, and I hope you're satisfied."

It is not very likely that Mr. Tarrant's prospects were impaired by his not having conveyed the meditated departure of the Doctor to his superiors. He was a man of that kind that may be considered meritorious if they only succeed in retaining the position in life in which they started.

"No Polly, I've stuck to you through thick and thin, although I've known all along as you weren't a woman calculated to help a fellow along in the world, but this settles it. I cast you off now for ever."

There was one part of Mr. Tarrant's speech which was undoubtedly true. He had stuck to Polly for some years, and it would have been very

much to that young woman's advantage if he had not. Now her opportunity had come. He offered her release, but do you suppose that he thought, any more than you or I do, that she would take advantage of it; that she would recognise that she was well quit of a lazy, worthless, contemptible hound? Not she. She did just as such women will, she clung to this worthless idol of hers from what can be only adequately described as "sheer cussedness." She shed tears and implored Dick to forgive her, and Police-constable Tarrant, after bullying her for half an hour, finally condescended to kiss, forgive, and borrow half a sovereign from her, and then stalked forth to resume his official duties, and actually ruminate over whether Sergeant Evans was aware of the Doctor's departure.

Sergeant Evans had acquired his information by sheer accident, an acquaintance who happened to have witnessed the Doctor's exodus, mentioning it as a bit of casual gossip, and the Sergeant was quite aware that he had no grounds whatever for interfering with him in any way. The man was eccentric—an enigma, if you like; but Evans could not honestly say that he suspected him to be a coiner. He had no earthly right to search the doctor's residence, but he felt that it would be a great satisfaction to him if he could have a look through that laboratory of which Constable Tarrant had given such a glowing description.

It is true that Constable Tarrant had never seen it, but that did not hinder him from giving a fictitious account of it, and the difficulty he had about obtaining admittance. He thought it advanced him in the eyes of his superiors, and showed zeal and intelligence in the performance of his duty.

It was merely a whim, the Sergeant thought, as he turned the thing over in his mind; but still it was a whim it should be easy to gratify. He had already a suspicion that Mr. Tarrant's accuracy was not quite to be depended on, but if there was a young woman in the house who was a bit sweet upon him, he ought surely to have no difficulty in persuading her to let himself and a friend have a peep into the mysterious chamber.

"Workshop of a great chemist—the sanctum of a celebrated man! and all that sort of flummery. Myself a disciple—humble admirer of the famous Dr. Lynden. Yes, that's the caper. Tarrant's not very bright, but he surely ought to have no difficulty in working that. It isn't business, I know; but we've all our weaknesses, and I really am curious to know what's the Doctor's little game."

The Sergeant lost no time in explaining to Dick what he expected of him, and in a few days, by a judicious mixture of coaxing and bullying, that worthy had extorted a promise from Phybbs that she would allow them to look into the laboratory, upon the condition that they didn't pull things about. To this Dick willingly pledged himself, and

at once informed his superior officer of his success. Miss Phybbs' time being now at her own disposal, it was settled that they should proceed to the Doctor's house the next day, and there Polly received them, and was favoured with a somewhat fervid rhapsody on her master's transcendent talents, by Sergeant Evans. Rigidly as the Doctor had kept the door of the laboratory locked while at home, it had struck Polly as singular that he should have left the key almost ostentatiously on his dressing-table on leaving. She led the way and the two men followed her. Tarrant felt confident that they were on the verge of discoveries, and that Evans' practised eye would speedily seize upon indications of coining. Polly threw open the door, and Tarrant, to whom the fittings of a laboratory presented themselves for the first time, had no doubt that his suspicions were fully confirmed, and that all the necessities for coining on a large scale met his gaze. He was about to appeal to the Sergeant, when a prompt frown warned him to hold his tongue. Evans, in his assumed character of a profound admirer of the great man, throwing himself into a quaint armchair, requested them not to speak to him.

Tarrant meanwhile went fussing about, peeping into crucibles, peeping into retorts, and poking his nose into drawers, under the profound impression that he was playing the detective officer to the life. The Sergeant never moved from his chair, but his

restless eyes roved incessantly round the room. His lip curled contemptuously as he thought, "What an old fool I am! coining; there's not a sign of it. Why on earth should one imagine that he was other than what he professed—a man with a fad for chemistry, and who is occasionally visited by friends with similar tastes? Never recollect hearing, though, of a lady addicted to smart bonnets being given that way. Odd! To be sure it's no business of mine," and here his eye fell upon the empty grate, where it was apparent a considerable number of letters and papers had been recently burnt; some few indeed yet remained. The officer rose from his chair, and seeing that his companions were too occupied with each other to notice him, picked up the half-burnt papers and slipped them into his pocket; and then, quietly returning to his seat, once more let his eyes rove round the apartment.

Polly was far too deeply interested in Dick's investigations to think of anything else. He had told her that the crucibles, etc., were all conclusive evidence of the manufacture of spurious money.

"Yes," he said, "all we want to do now is to find two or three bits of bad money, and then the case is complete; and it will be I, Constable Richard Tarrant, who will have led to the conviction of the most notorious coiner of the day."

"Lor," said Polly, "I should never have guessed what all these pots and bottles were for; but he

don't seem much interested, Dick," and she cast a look towards the Sergeant, who had risen from his chair, and strolled towards the writing table, a waste paper basket standing near which had attracted his attention. On seeing that he was observed, the Sergeant, presumably in his confusion, dropped his hat, and when he had recovered it, the few torn letters that the basket contained were no longer there.

Evans now seemed to have worshipped sufficiently at the shrine of the great man for whom he expressed such reverence, and thanking Polly profusely for having admitted him to the workshop of the famous Dr. Lynden, intimated that it was time to go. Tarrant knew better than not to promptly respond to his superior's hint, and having taken leave of Miss Phybbs, the pair were quickly in the street.

"Pretty strong that," quoth Constable Tarrant, exultingly, "I should think there's enough evidence there to convict——"

"You, of being the biggest fool in the force," quoth Sergeant Evans, with more brevity than politeness, and with that he left Mr. Tarrant to his own reflections.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WINTER QUARTERS.

THE great siege was over, and the Army, like the Doctor, was speculating and wondering what next. One thing seemed pretty clear, that the belligerents

who were round Sebastopol both desired repose after the tremendous struggle of the last twelve months. It was pretty confidently believed that, although there might be no armistice, there would certainly be no further hostilities until the spring came round again.

Our old friends the —th had left the lines they had lived in so long, and marched down to join the newly-formed second brigade of the Highland Division which was occupying the Vanoutka Pass. What a change it was, and how they all revelled in it, after the hot, dusty plateau ! To sit outside the huts here and smoke, and look down the gorge, thickly wooded with scrub, which led to the glittering waters of the Black Sea ; or to get on the ponies, canter through the Pass, and picnic in the lovely valley of Baidar, and reflect how hard it was upon the luckless Tartars who had to evacuate their pretty villages therein—all that was luxury. There were no trenches nowadays. As Tom Byng remarked :

“It seems as if we'd all come up here for the holidays, and had nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves.”

To a regiment worked as this had been, such easy work as road making or carrying up boards and stores over the hill from Balaklava, was child's play. They were in the early days of October now—bright, clear, sunshiny days, with just that touch of crispness in the air which always cha-

racterises the "chill" month of the year. What bathing parties there were after parade, to ride down that rugged gorge and take a header into the Euxine. How those recreants who voted it was getting too cold were chaffed and chivied into their huts, only to reappear with their towels in compliance with popular opinion. There was little fear of the army not having a good time this winter. Stores there were in abundance, not a regiment that did not bid fair to be well hutted before the winter set in, and as for kit, it looked as if each British soldier would require a bullock trunk to himself whenever it came to moving again. Filled with remorse for the sufferings the army had undergone the first winter, the nation were determined that there should be no recurrence of such in the second. They had perhaps gone rather into the opposite extreme, and the private soldier was served out with what his officers speedily determined to be an unfortunate superfluity of clothing. In grateful acknowledgment of the care they were taking of him the soldier had a knack of putting *all* his warm clothing on at once, and when a man is encumbered with a fur-lined jacket, a great coat, and a waterproof over all, he is not so useful on a working party as he might be. A wonderful find, too, had occurred to the —th. They had discovered, in the gorge before mentioned, two large wood stacks of cedar, all chopped up into logs suitable for firewood. All the previous winter the

ground had been in the possession of the Russians, and it had presumably been cut and stacked by them, and abandoned when they withdrew their troops and ceased any longer to menace Balaklava.

Tom Byng, who occupies a hut slightly detached from what might be designated the "Officers' Barracks," is smoking a pipe in front of his dwelling, in all the abandon of his shirt sleeves, when his attention is roused by the sound of his name being freely bandied about in the huts just below. Glancing that way, he sees a Cossack with long lance and a wiry little steed, and wonders not a little how he came there. He certainly didn't come down the pass, or he should have seen him ; he must have come up the road from Kamara. Next it becomes evident from the shouts of his brother officers that the business of the Cossack is with himself. Tom accordingly walks down towards the mess hut, but the easiness of his attire makes the Cossack doubtful as to his being a field officer of the British Army. Reassured, however, by some of those more correctly attired, he salutes and hands Tom a letter in a woman's handwriting.

"How the deuce did he come here?" asked Tom of his brother officers as he took the missive.

"Well, he must have come down Mackenzie's Heights," said one of them, "for he's got a safe conduct from the commanding officer of the Sardinians on Traktir Bridge. There is nobody can make him understand a word we say, though

we've tried him in all the tongues we know, we even had Mickey Flinn up to act as interpreter," continued the speaker laughing, "on the strength of his having declared our friend there to be a Kerry man. However, his mission apparently is to bring you that note."

Tom tore it open, glanced hastily over it, and then gave a loud hurrah !

"Here you are, you fellows," he exclaimed, "the best bit of news that's come our way for ever so long. Hugh Fleming's all right ; at least when I say all right he's alive and there's a hope he'll pull through. Here you, Flinn," he continued, singling out Mickey from a group of soldiers who were watching the proceedings from a respectful distance, "I don't know whether he's a Kerry man or not, but give him something to eat and drink and take care of him," and the Cossack quickly interpreting the signs that meat and drink awaited him, resigned himself at once to the charge of Mickey Flinn and his comrades. Tom then turned into the mess hut, followed by three or four of his brother officers.

"Fleming don't write himself," said Brydon, "it's not his hand-writing surely ? "

"No," replied Tom, "my correspondent is a lady. I'll read you her letter. She writes in French, which though I can't speak I can read."

“October 4th.

“MONSIEUR,—I write at the request of Captain Fleming, of your regiment, to inform you that we now hope he will do well. He was badly wounded in the last terrible day of the siege, a day the horrors of which I shall never forget, should I live to be a hundred. Like many other ladies, I have devoted myself to nursing the wounded, but ah, Monsieur! on that dreadful day, what could we do? Our streets were strewn with the dead and dying, our hospitals were full to overflowing. In the retreat which followed some of our wounded were sent across the harbour, and some were sent to Batchi Serai. Ah, such a terrible march! and it was pitiful to see how our poor patients suffered. Amongst them was Captain Fleming, and the uniform told me he belonged to the same regiment as yourself. It was enough—a life for a life. I had vowed weeks before that if ever anyone of that regiment fell to my care, if devoted nursing could save him he should have it.

“Ah, Monsieur, I owe you a great deal of gratitude, and, for your sake, the whole of your gallant corps. You saved the life of my only brother—you robbed him of the results of his daring enterprise, but you saved his life. Captain Fleming has hovered between life and death for weeks, but our doctors now hold forth hopes. It will be my pride to restore him to you cured, when our rulers permit. He will write to you himself as

soon as he is able, but he is too weak to hold a pen at present.

"Accept, Monsieur, the profoundest assurances of my gratitude and friendship,

"Yours very faithfully,

"MARIE IVANHOFF."

"Well," said Brydon, as Byng finished, "I'm awfully glad Hugh Fleming is alive and likely to get all right again. You seem to have unwittingly done him a good turn in saving Ivanhoff's life, whoever he may be. Do you recollect anything about it?"

"Oh, yes," said Tom ; "I never knew his name, but the writer of this can only be the sister of the spy I took that day in the advance. I remember now he enquired particularly what my name was before he was marched off to head-quarters."

"I suppose they've got him in prison somewhere down at Constantinople," said Brydon.

"I fancy so," said Byng. "I only know that he was shipped off from this to be detained as a prisoner."

"Fleming's very fortunate," said the surgeon of the regiment, who had been listening to the discussion. "We have seen what the inside of Sebastopol is like : the place literally reeks of carnage. Any fellow badly wounded the last few days of the siege stood but a poor chance of pulling through there. Batchi Serai I believe to be a charming place ; I only hope we shall have a chance of seeing it next spring."

"That'll depend, Doctor," said Brydon, with a quiet smile, "on how many of us get up Mackenzie Heights. The Russians will very likely set us a stiff nut to crack there."

And then a lively discussion ensued as to in what direction the advance would be made next year, in the midst of which Tom Byng suddenly recollected that it was incumbent upon him to write a letter to Hugh, and also another of thanks to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, for all her care and attention, preparatory to the return of the warrior of the Don to his own people. These ready, the Cossack was soon discovered fraternising amazingly with the little knot of soldiers under the presidency of Mickey Flinn, and after grinning a farewell to his entertainers, departed in the direction of the Tchernaya with Tom's missives.

One of the first things that occurred to Byng after his emissary had departed was that he must now write to Miss Lynden, and tell her about Hugh. He had rather expected to hear from that young lady, and singularly enough had been a little disappointed that he had not done so. Why he should be anxious to hear from Nellie, it would be hard to say, but that her letters usually contained some allusion to Frances Smerdon may perhaps account for it.

"They are all alike," he muttered, puffing savagely at his pipe. "There's Hugh, now he's got a bit round, fretting his heart out about that

girl, and she—well she's apparently resigned and prepared for the worst. Shouldn't wonder if she will feel as disappointed as Jim Lockwood vowed the regiment all were at my coming to life again. Daresay she thinks one sweetheart at home worth half-a-dozen in the Crimea. There, what a brute I am to go on abusing as nice a girl as ever I met. Don't I know she's been crying her eyes out about Hugh? I don't know what's come to me of late. Getting sick of the whole beastly business I suppose, or else my liver's out of order. Now you fellows," he continued, addressing two or three of his brother officers who were lounging in front of the mess hut, "who's for a canter to the Phoros Pass and back?"

Tom Byng's discontent with womankind would have been very much modified had he made a different reply to Miss Smerdon's note. Frances only wanted encouragement to open a very hot correspondence with Major Byng; but he was not very likely to hear from her, or even of her, again now. He couldn't guess that Miss Lynden and her father had disappeared from all knowledge of their old friends, and even that the letter he had just written to her was destined to be many a long day before it reached her hands. Indeed Tom Byng was fated to be kept in profound ignorance of all that was happening to his late friends, not only until he reached England, but even for some time afterwards. They had a glorious ride that

afternoon, through the valleys of Vanoutka and Baidar, right away through the quaint rocky arch which forms the Phoros Pass, till they stood on the winding road on the edge of the cliffs that leads to Aloutka, with the Black Sea shimmering in the light of the setting sun like a placid lake at their feet. Who could have thought to look at that now tranquil piece of water it could have wrought such wild work as it had last November, when it had thrown big ships about as if they had been corks, and sent the "Black Prince," crammed with urgently wanted stores, pitilessly to the bottom.

Then they turned the ponies about and rode homewards with an assurance very different from that of the bulk of the army the preceding October, to wit, that they would find a plentiful and comfortable dinner awaiting them.

"Well," said Tom Byng, as they entered the mess hut, "this is a considerable improvement from what we know our fellows had to go through last winter. Talk about campaigning! It would trouble you to improve much upon this, even at home. Show me a mess-room in England where the sybarites have got a fireplace like that, and with cedar logs burning in it."

"Yes," said Brydon, "the room quite smells as if we were a disappointed sketching party burning our pencils. What's dining off silver to dining with such appetites as we've got? And then to think that we've done with all that confounded trench work."

"Yes," rejoined Tom, "whatever may be before us next spring, I devoutly hope we shan't be in for another siege. It's our first experience of the real thing, and we'll trust the fighting will take some other form in future."

The mess hut of the —th was indeed a noble apartment for a regiment in the field. Four officers' quarters had been thrown together to form it, and a large brick fireplace and chimney built in at one side. Grate there was none ; this was a large open chimney place such as you may see in old castles and country houses in England, meant only for the burning of wood, and therein flamed night and day two or three mighty cedar logs, which were constantly replenished ; for that fire was attended with as much devotion through the long winter as if it had been the sacred flame of a Parsee temple. Many were the banquets and revels that took place in that wooden hut.

If the regiment had not shared in the fasting of the previous winter they were well to the fore in the feasting of this, and an invitation to dine at the mess of the —th was a thing that quite warranted the rejection of most previous engagements. Stores were plenty at Balaklava, and they were no great distance from that place ; while the mess committee had thrown themselves heartily into their work, and developed a pretty taste for foraging of which they had hitherto been unsuspected.

The days draw in ; Christmas is creeping upon them. The cold increases, and the first snowstorms come driving across the Steppes, as if to warn them that the last winter was by no means exceptional, but that the Crimean climate is as rigorous at that season as ever it is in England. But what are cold and snow to men with plenty to eat, lots of warm clothing, good fires and warm huts ?

Assuredly the Army made light of its troubles that winter. There were private theatricals and lots of entertainments that Christmas time. A popular man might find his engagement list as well filled as in the London season. The soldiers too waxed fat and healthy—the hospitals were almost empty ; and when Luders saw, as he did when the spring came round, those twenty-eight thousand Englishmen march past on the plateau of Sebastopol, he might well look with admiration on them. *They were all grit.* All the weakly stuff had died out of them ; what was left was the seasoned wood—the genuine article.

That the genuine article drank hard I am afraid must be admitted. I daresay they passed the wine cup pretty freely at Capua, at all events they did in the Crimea. British philanthropy, ever on the *qui vive*, was naturally very much exercised at this, and mooted several schemes for the more profitable expenditure of the soldiers' money. One philanthropic watch-maker indeed was so moved at these rumours that he suggested the superfluous pay of

the soldier should be utilised for the purchase of one of his firm's silver lever mounted watches ; but this proposal was not cordially met, though as one of the doggrel bards of the camp sang at the time :

“ Who can doubt of the chime
Of our marking time,
When it's done by a Jones' watch? ”

Perhaps the climate pulled them through, perhaps the healthiness of the life they led defied injury to the constitution, but at all events if they drank as hard as that famous army of Flanders swore, they throve upon it, and were uncommonly healthy.

That he never got a line from Miss Lynden puzzled Tom Byng as the winter wore away ; but that he did not hear again from Hugh Fleming puzzled him still more, especially as he had once or twice taken advantage of a flag of truce going across the Russian lines, to forward a note to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

MADemoiselle IVANHOFF.

A LITTLE before Christmas an event had occurred which Dr. Lynden had foreseen as likely, and which he had predicted might count for a good deal in increasing the prospects of peace, should it happen. Kars had capitulated, its gallant defenders having at last been starved into submission. Mouravieff had clung to his prey with the tenacity

of a bull-dog, and his perseverance had been at length rewarded. The utter failure of Omar Pasha to come to the relief of Sir Fenwick Williams gave cause to much angry feeling both at home and in the Crimea. There was a prevalent idea in the English army, that the defenders of Kars had been politically sacrificed, and that had the hands of the Turkish General not been tied, the defence would not have been in vain, and that he could have compelled the Russians to raise the siege before the garrison were reduced to extremities. Be that as it may, the Russians could now, at all events, point to the capture of Kars as a set-off to the loss of Sebastopol. There are people to this day of that way of thinking, and who still believe that salve to Russia's honour had much to say to bringing the war to a conclusion.

With the spring came councils and congresses, much diplomacy, and many protocols, the first result of which was the conclusion of an armistice. With the spring, too, came much drilling and smartening up of regiments that perpetual trench duty had made slovenly of appearance. Field days on a large scale became of constant occurrence, and the whole army speedily resumed the appearance it might have worn had it been brought together in England, only with a workman-like look about it that old campaigners could thoroughly appreciate. Advantage was taken of the armistice by officers on both sides to visit each

other's lines, and here the English, thanks to the insatiable restlessness of their nation, speedily outvied both their Allies and the Russians. The privilege was used sparingly by both the latter, but the British officer was emphatically "all over the place." He made his appearance at Batchi Serai, made pilgrimages to the scene of the battle of the Alma, he penetrated to the caves of Inkermann, and the limits of his travel seemed only bounded by the capabilities of a Crimean pony. As Brydon remarked, laughing, "No wonder our fellows are restless. We all feel as if we'd been strictly confined to our own parish for months. It's quite a luxury to break out and see how our neighbours get along."

"Just so," rejoined Byng, "and I tell you what it is, I vote we start for Batchi Serai to-morrow morning. We can go there and back in a day if we start early and take it easy."

"Done with you," said Brydon, "it's a longish day for the ponies, but the wiry little brutes 'll do it easy enough. That dash of Barb blood they most of them have in their veins pulls them through."

So it was finally settled that what Byng called a reconnaissance should be made next day, and that those two should ride to Batchi Serai with a view to prospecting for an expedition on a considerably larger scale a week or two later.

"We'll make up a party, you know," said Tom,

"half a dozen of us, get a week's leave, take up tents, servants and pack animals, and make a big picnic of it."

"Capital," replied Brydon, "we're all cunning in camp life now, and we ought to have a splendid time. There's one thing, you can depend on the weather out here. When fine weather's due it's fine, though it can be nasty enough in the winter too."

"I wonder whether we shall pick up any news of Hugh Fleming in Batchi Serai, most of these Russian fellows speak French."

"Which we don't," rejoined Brydon, laughing, "so that won't much facilitate intercourse between us. But it don't matter, Fleming's doubtless been sent away far into the interior, or we should have heard from him before this. He's as likely as not at St. Petersburg."

A little after six the next morning the pair crossed the Traktir Bridge, and having cantered across the valley made their way up Mackenzie Heights. It was a lovely spring morning, and their ponies seemed to revel in the fresh air and sunshine to the full as much as their masters, and when they halted on the banks of the Belbeck and produced from their haversacks materials for an early luncheon, Brydon declared he had never been so hungry in his life, while Tom said he felt more like a schoolboy home for the holidays than ever. After a brief halt, they resumed their journey, and

a little before noon entered the old capital of the Tartar kings. The first thing to find, undoubtedly, was an inn at which they could stay and rest their ponies. The unflinching little brutes had carried them well, but they had seven-and-twenty miles to carry them back, and required a good long bait before being called on to fulfil their task ; as for their riders they had the town to see, such as it was. They were not long before they stumbled on one of those men who swarm all around the shores of the Mediterranean and Asiatic Turkey, men whose nationality it is impossible to define and who seem to speak, more or less, all the tongues of Europe. They are generally vaguely described as coming from the Levant, and from bankers to couriers, from restaurant waiters to promiscuous loafing and vagabondage, seem never at a loss about picking up a living. Some of them drive carriages, but many of them, like the man who so speedily became alive to the requirements of the two British officers, seem, though never at a loss for a job, incapable of taking up with steady employment. Their self-constituted guide quickly found them a suitable inn, and then in obedience to their behests conducted them through the principal parts of the town. There seemed to have been a touch of the Moor about the old Mongolian race before they had succumbed to the hordes of the Muscovite, as evidenced by the verandahs of the houses and the large tree-shaded

gardens in which they were built. You would have said it was a pretty town lying at the bottom of a valley, well sheltered from the bitter blasts of the Steppes, but nothing more. The old palace of the Khans, though in excellent repair, struck Byng and Brydon as hardly imposing enough a home for such powerful rulers as the Tartar princes had been in the heyday of their power. In the beautiful gardens around it, a Russian band was playing a set of German vales, while strolling about, or sitting on chairs, were numbers of officers in every variety of uniform, from the Horse Artillery of the Imperial Guard down to the sturdy linesman. A few French uniforms, with a tolerably good mixture of the English scarlet. A few ladies, richly dressed, were scattered about amongst the chairs, and evidently in great request with the *militaires* fortunate enough to be acquainted with them.

"Well," said Brydon, "these fellows are all brushed up like ourselves. They show small signs of having been through such times as they must have had the last few weeks in Sebastopol."

"Ho!" rejoined Byng, "here comes a poor fellow though, who still bears signs of having been well in the thick of it," and as he spoke, a Russian officer, whose face bore traces of severe illness, limped past with the assistance of a stick, and raised his cap with grave courtesy to the two Englishmen. They speedily found themselves

cordially received by their late enemies, who not only expressed delight at seeing them but great regret at hearing that they were not to spend a few days there. One thing, however, a grey-headed colonel with a decidedly Kalmuck cast of countenance, insisted on, was that they should join him in a *ponche* after the music was finished.

“Ha! the *galope finale*,” remarked one of the other officers. The band struck up the “Stürm Marsch,” and Tom could hardly repress a slight start as the well-known air once more fell upon his ears. It recalled the night of that ball at Manchester, when he had first thought that he had good hopes of winning Frances Smerdon’s love. How the thought had grown stronger week by week during his stay in that place, and how before he had made up his mind to speak, the route had come, and he had determined that was no time for such nonsense. How he had sternly resolved that no love-making should escape his lips, but that he would sail for the East leaving the girl unfettered, and put his fate to the test should he come safe home again. It was well, he thought, that he had made that decision when he first heard of Miss Smerdon’s sarcastic remarks. He was not quite so sure about that now; that letter she had written to him, when she thought he was seriously wounded, had made him take a more modified view of her conduct.

We know that he was sorry he had sent such an

answer as he did to Frances' missive ; he was not at all certain that he had not made a confounded fool of himself by his Spartan reticence. You can't expect a girl to take the initiative in an affair of this kind.

" Do you suppose, sir,
That the rose, sir,
Picks itself to deck your breast ? "

However, it is all over now, and here his reflections were suddenly interrupted by Brydon's ejaculating, " By Heavens, Tom, look there ! " Following the direction of Brydon's gesture, Tom's eyes fell upon a pretty young lady, smartly dressed, with the most coquettish of bonnets upon her head, who was exchanging salutations right and left with the Russian officers, and having for her cavalier no other than Hugh Fleming, looking as well as ever he had done in his life.

" Ah, Monsieur recognises some one," said one of the Russians talking to Brydon, turning round. " Ah, yes, your compatriot ; you know him, I presume ? "

" Yes, he belongs to my own regiment," said Brydon, " he's a *camarade*, a brother officer, what do you call it ? — *frère* officer."

" Ah, brother officer," replied the Russian politely in English.

" Oh lord, Tom," said Brydon in an undertone, " it's very convenient but rather humiliating, all these fellows speak better English than we do."

"Yes," said Byng, "Captain Fleming is one of ourselves. May I ask who is the very pretty lady with whom he is walking?"

"That is Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. Captain Fleming has been very fortunate. Many of us would have taken his wound to have so fair a nurse."

"Well, he certainly don't look as if he had anything the matter with him now," said Brydon.

"Oh, no," rejoined the Russian, "he's as well as any of us, but he's a prisoner on *parole*. *Ma foi*," he added with a slight sneer, "they need not have asked for his *parole*, Mademoiselle's chains would have been quite sufficient."

"Well, we must go across and shake hands with Hugh," said Byng. "Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, you said. I once had the honour of meeting her brother under rather peculiar circumstances."

"*Sacré tonnerre*," exclaimed the Russian, "then it was you who took Alexis Ivanhoff prisoner before the eyes of the whole army. It was *superbe, magnifique*, but I should think, Monsieur, the exploit would hardly recommend you to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff," and so saying, the Russian slightly raised his hat and turned on his heel.

But by this, Hugh had caught sight of them, and was springing forward to meet them, when he was momentarily checked by his fair companion. Glancing at the English officers, she said something rapidly to him, and in another moment

Hugh was cordially shaking hands with Byng and Brydon.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "how glad I am to see you fellows again! Of course you've heard all about me, how I was taken prisoner and should have died, I verily believe, if it hadn't been for Marie—Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, I mean—she called herself Sister Marie, you know," he added, a little confusedly, "during the time she was a hospital nurse."

"And you're all sound again now," said Brydon.

"Fit as a fiddle," rejoined Hugh. "But come and be introduced to my kind nurse, she is very anxious to see you, Tom, as you may well imagine."

Now this was just a point upon which Tom had considerable misgivings. He had had his doubts beforehand, even when he had read the letter of "Sister Marie's," and as he looked at the haughty, resolute face of the young lady, it struck him there was a strong dash of her brother's spirit about her, and that the remark of his late Russian acquaintance was probably a good deal nearer the truth. However, he had no time for farther reflection, for by this Hugh was introducing him to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. That lady extended her hand graciously to him as she said with a smile :

"Ah, Major Byng and I are not like people meeting for the first time. Is it not so? I have heard much of him, not only from Captain

Fleming but also from my brother. Alexis owes his life to you, monsieur."

Tom murmured some common-place remark to the effect that any one else in his place would have done the same, but even as he spoke he thought there was a slight curl in Mademoiselle's lips, a wicked flash in her eye, and though she had naturally a very sweet voice, its tones jarred upon his ear, as if, fair though the words, they were spoken in mockery. Still, the young lady could be very winning when she chose, and for the next few minutes, there was no doubt, she exerted all her fascinations to subjugate Tom, and at the end of that time he had come to the conclusion that he was a suspicious old beast and was beginning to lose faith in everyone. He had forgotten that Hugh, in ordinary courtesy, could not indulge his thirst for information concerning letters, camp news, &c., until Mademoiselle had, so to speak, finished with himself, and Mademoiselle entirely monopolised him till the band was over, and the gardens rapidly thinning. Then she turned to address a few courteous words to Brydon and explain that she was *désolée* at hearing they were returning to their lines that night.

"I was in hopes that you were about to pass a few days here, when I should have had the opportunity of really making your acquaintance, but you will come up again in a week or two, won't you? Major Byng says it's to be so, and I shall hope to see more of you then."

"No letters for me," exclaimed Hugh, "and yet, like the dear good fellow you are, you say you wrote to Nellie and told her that I was all right."

"There is no letter for you from Miss Lynden," replied Byng. "She wrote to me as I tell you in the first instance, but I've not heard from her since I wrote to tell her you were all right. I can tell you no more."

"It's deuced odd," said Hugh as he knit his brows, "I can't understand it."

"Captain Fleming," said Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, "I must once more claim your services. You promised to be my escort to Madame Radski's tea."

"Yes, it's time to say good-bye," remarked Brydon, "you see, Tom, our friends are waiting for us."

"Ah, some of our officers are going to entertain you," said Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. "I will therefore say good-bye. Remember, you are not to be long before you come to see us again," and she bowed to the two Englishmen.

"Well, good-bye, Hugh," said Byng. "I had hoped you'd have seen us through this *ponche*."

"Ah, if that's it," laughed Mademoiselle, "I'll release you, Captain Fleming. I cannot well go to this tea without an escort, but that is of no consequence."

"Ah, no," replied Hugh, laughing, "we cannot have your tea sacrificed for a *ponche*. I will take you to Madame Radski's and I shall have lots of

time to say good-bye to my old comrades here afterwards," and with that Hugh walked off with Mademoiselle Ivanhoff.

"Fancy that Russian fellow's about right," said Brydon grinning, "and that Master Hugh is in the toils. We live and learn, Tom, and it strikes me that being taken prisoner is a long way off the worst thing that can happen to one in campaigning."

"Hugh looks like making a confounded fool of himself," rejoined Byng, sulkily. "As you know, he is engaged to as nice a girl as ever stepped, at home, and as for 'Sister Marie,' forsooth, she's a deal too good-looking a young woman to have prancing about a hospital. I could laugh outright when I think of the mental picture I drew of her at Vanoutka, when I got her letter. There's not much of the hospital nurse left about her now. Well, come on, Heaven send us safe through this *ponche*, for we've a long ride before us, and these Russian fellows can drink vodka by the gallon without its affecting their heads."

CHAPTER XX.

BATCHI SERAI.

BYNG'S anticipations, however, proved groundless, their entertainers quite recognized that they had a good many miles to ride that night, and had no intentions of challenging them to a drinking bout. There was no attempt to press them to do more

than drink a stirrup cup. Caviare and brandy were scattered about the tables of the restaurant, but the staple of the entertainment of Byng and Brydon consisted of bottled stout, which was dispensed to them in wine glasses, and forcibly recalled to their minds Mr. Swiveller's celebrated dictum on the tasting of malt liquors. It was not till they had purchased their experience on a subsequent visit that they realised the delicate intentions of their entertainers. In the eyes of a foreigner, an Englishman is regarded as a beer-drinking creature. At all events he was in the days of which I am writing, and the Russians when they produced the stout were producing their choicest vintage. Bottled stout was dearer in their lines than champagne, and sold currently at twelve shillings a bottle. However, the *ponche* was soon over and the pair were once more jogging along on their homeward way. Each man was smoking, and immersed in his own reflections. Tom could not help thinking of his parting with Alexis Ivanhoff. He had not thought so much of it at the time, but the sister recalled the brother's manner so vividly to his recollection. Ivanhoff had asked him his name, declared that he owed him his life, and that though it was not likely it might chance to be in his power sometime to repay the obligation, in the hurly-burly of a big war like this there was no knowing what might happen, still Tom thought there had been a *soupeçon* of

mockery in his tones as he spoke. If he had saved his life, Tom had most certainly disappointed the ambitions based on his successfully carrying out his hazardous enterprise, and Tom reflected that, but for himself, the Russian might have regained his own lines unhurt. No, it was open to question whether the Ivanhoffs owed him much gratitude. However, he was not likely to see much more of them, even if it should chance that he met Mademoiselle again in their proposed trip up the country. There was great curiosity to hear their report, when, at a late hour, they made their appearance in the mess-room. Everyone was delighted to hear such a flourishing account of Hugh Fleming ; but what explanation did he give for not writing ? and now it flashed across the two travellers, that in that brief conversation with Hugh that point had never been touched upon. It was odd, Byng admitted, but they had so much to talk about he had quite forgotten to ask Hugh that question.

“I suppose he hadn’t time,” at length said Brydon, “Fleming’s got his hands pretty full just now, I should say,” he continued with a mischievous glance at Tom. Brydon invariably discountenanced marrying amongst his brother officers. He held that it spoilt the mess, and that soldiers had no business with wives, holding I am afraid to the slack breezy old adage of a fresh quarter and a fresh flame. Byng resolutely de-

clined to be drawn upon this point, but some of the others were not so reticent, and were much amused with Brydon's account of "Sister Marie." "Nobody but a born fool," he concluded, "would ever dream of coming off the sick list with such a nurse as that."

"Was she so very handsome then?" enquired a susceptible subaltern.

"Well, it's so long since I've seen a pretty woman that I'm hardly a fair judge, but she's about as good-looking as they make 'em. And now I'm off to roost, for I'm dog-tired. Good-night all of you."

Nothing much in all this, but idle gossip travels a long way at times.

* * * * *

Hugh Fleming was quite conscious that he had rather got himself into a scrape of late ; it had come about so naturally and so gradually that he really, to this minute, could not exactly say how it had all happened. In those early days, when he lay badly wounded and burnt up with fever, when the fires of life were flickering day by day, and when it was doubtful that he would ever see a morrow's sun, he was only dimly sensible of a soft hand that bathed his brow and smoothed his pillow, of a gentle presence that hovered round his bedside, and seemed to bring with it rest and quietness. As his strength and powers of observation returned, it was soothing to lie there and watch the tall slender figure of his nurse as she busied herself about her ward,

and he became aware that, in spite of the unbecoming costume, Sister Marie was a young and good-looking woman with brilliant dark eyes and a particularly sweet smile. During that tedious convalescence, her assiduity was unwearied. She encouraged him to talk to her about himself, checked him quietly but firmly whenever she thought he was overtiring himself, and in short, in those days of weakness, drew from Hugh pretty well his whole history. Not a very eventful one, nor had she any particular interest in learning it, but previous training had rendered this almost intuitive with Marie Ivanhoff. As he got better and stronger and was able to leave his sick bed, it was Sister Marie's arm that supported his tottering steps, the dark eyes softening marvelously when she was employed in his service, and before three months had elapsed from the storming of the Redan, Hugh Fleming awoke to the fact that he was on very sentimental terms with his nurse. The Russian sick, like the English, now the hardships of campaigning were relaxed, improved rapidly. If supplies were not so plentiful as in the British lines, still, at Batchi Serai there was no lack of sufficient food. Nature, that mighty assistant of all doctors, was having fair play, and now lending her powerful aid with a will. The consequence was, the hospitals were rapidly vacated, and at length the number of patients became so few, that Marie Ivanhoff and one or two more

of the younger ladies resigned their posts, threw off their dresses as nurses, and once more appeared radiant in their ordinary apparel.

Hugh was much struck when his late nurse presented herself, no longer, as she laughingly informed him, in that capacity, but as Mademoiselle Ivanhoff come to visit M. le Capitaine Fleming and congratulate him on his recovery from his late serious illness. It is possible that Hugh rather over-did the gratitude on this occasion, and thanked Mademoiselle more effusively and affectionately than was absolutely necessary, but one thing is quite certain, that Fleming found he had slipped imperceptibly from the *rôle* of a patient into that of a lover. And if soft smiles and sweet glances went for anything, into that of a favoured one too—Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was no innocent girl, but a worldly young lady, who had seen men and cities; but she was also of an imperious disposition, and one who gave free rein to her caprices—one of those women who indulge in those small whirlwinds of passion which their imagination so magnifies. Flirtations with them, while they last, always assume the dignity of a *grande passion*, Mademoiselle on this occasion had become, in the first instance, interested in the man she had nursed back to life. She had wound up by falling in love with him after her fashion.

Ah, they were dull, these provincial towns, this young Englishman would serve to amuse one here

in the spring-time; and from this point of view Marie had appropriated Hugh in the beginning. However, it could not be said from want of competition Mademoiselle Ivanhoff had allowed herself to be more infatuated about this new lover than she usually permitted herself. There were plenty of her compatriots quite willing to enliven Batchi Serai for the capricious lady. She never lacked admirers, let her go where she would, but she had elected the Englishman her cavalier, and all endeavours to shake his position proved hopeless.

It was awkward for Hugh, but it was not very easy to say how he could extricate himself. He was a prisoner, and so could not run away from temptation. He could not quarrel with the woman who had nursed him unweariedly through that terrible illness. It was not that he was false to his English love, though there were passages in his flirtation with Marie Ivanhoff that would have scarcely met her approval. Still, when a young man of about six and twenty, as in Hugh's case, is exposed to all the fascinations of a pretty woman who makes no attempt at concealing a *tendresse* for himself, it is small wonder if he gives occasion for the coupling of their names in the gossip of a small country town.

It was very singular, Hugh thought, that no news should have come to him of Nellie Lynden, of course he didn't get his letters with the regularity he would have done in his own lines, but

still, they did come to him, and at uncertain intervals a few were forwarded by his own regiment, so that had Nellie written he most certainly ought to have received anything there might be from her. His promotion too, he had ceased to think about that, he was out of it now, and it little signified what regiment bore him on its strength. He supposed that it was all over, that they would be all on their way home soon ; in Batchi Serai they seemed just as convinced that the war was finished, as they were in the Allied Camps. Hugh could not but admit that there was some truth in what a Russian Colonel had said to him :

“Yes, you have taken Sebastopol, but to the defence belongs all the glory. When the siege becomes history, it is not your side who will be most talked about, and among all the chiefs engaged in it, Todleben will stand out a head and shoulders above the rest.”

But what did Hugh care about history. The present was what he had to do with, and very pleasant he found it. It was *lotos* eating if you will, this dangling at the skirts of Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, it was not behaving quite fairly perhaps to his fiancée, but then, what could he do ? It might not be quite right, but it was very pleasant ; if his conduct was not exactly what it ought to be, he, at all events, couldn't help it, and because a man was engaged to be married to one woman, he wasn't justified in behaving like a brute to all the

rest. It would all come to an end now in a few weeks, and Marie and he would part dear good friends. He certainly did have occasional misgivings that parting might be an unpleasant business, he had not promised marriage to Marie Ivanhoff, neither had he informed her that he was pledged to another. But that young lady undoubtedly regarded him as quite her own property, and Hugh knew full well that those dark eyes of hers could lighten on occasion, and that she was not the woman to take a wound to her *amour propre* tamely.

There were two things that certainly ought to have occurred to Hugh had his mind not been pre-occupied, namely, that taking all the circumstances into consideration it would be as well that he should return to England, and secondly, that if he set to work in earnest there would probably not be much difficulty in his doing so. He was a prisoner on *parole* at present, and the peace he regarded as almost certain. It was not likely that the Russians would refuse him permission to go home if he would simply give his word not to serve against them in case of a resumption of hostilities. But if all this failed to cross the mind of Hugh Fleming, Tom Byng and his old brother officers were considerably struck by it. Why Hugh lingered at Batchi Serai was inexplicable, except upon the grounds of his having fallen deeply in love with this fair Russian. That would account for everything,

otherwise it was so very odd that he didn't come to spend the last few weeks of the Crimean campaign with them. None of them doubted that he had only to apply for such permission to obtain it, and one would have thought that he would have enjoyed having a last look at the old places where they had fought and suffered, in the society of the old comrades who had fought and suffered with him.

"Hang it," as Brydon said, "he ought to be anxious to see us, but when a fellow gets in that way he loses all sense of regard for his fellow creatures bar one. I'm blest if I don't think he looked upon Tom and me as rather *de trop* at Batchi Serai the other day."

It may easily be supposed that Fleming had no monopoly of the correspondence from Manchester. The regiment had been stationed there for some months, and one or two of his brother officers, although not circumstanced as Hugh was, exchanged a few letters with friends they had made there. And so it came to pass that though Hugh did not go to England, the news of his entanglement with Mademoiselle Ivanhoff did, and in due course it came to the ears of Frances Smerdon.

CHAPTER XXI.

POLLY'S MARRIAGE

FRANCES SMERDON had been leading a life of great discontent of late ; she was restless and discontented because she was left in complete ignor-

ance of a good deal that she was anxious to know. Of Nellie Lynden she had heard no word since she said good-bye to her at Manchester. Where she was, or what she was doing, Frances had no idea. That Hugh Fleming was alive and well she had gathered from the papers, which all contained paragraphs concerning the missing officer. In her anxiety to hear something of Nellie, she had written to Polly Phybbs, but the girl could only reply that she knew no more than Miss Smerdon, she had never seen or heard of either Dr. or Miss Lynden since their departure, that there were letters for both of them, but she did not know where to forward them; she further informed Miss Smerdon that it was very awkward, she did not know what to do; that the landlord of the house would, she was afraid, shortly give trouble; that a half year's rent would become due ere long, and that the proprietor stated that if he could hear nothing of the Doctor or his money by that time, he should be compelled to take the house once more into his own hands; that he did not understand a gentleman in Dr. Lynden's position absenting himself in such an extraordinary fashion, that it would be called absconding as a rule, and was suggestive of Dr. Lynden having fled from his creditors, but he acquitted him of that, because, to the best of his belief, he owed no man money in the city, except himself. Why could the Doctor not have given up the house before leaving, if he

had no further use for it? That was the usual custom with yearly tenants. He had been treated with no consideration, and should certainly not keep a house vacant for a man who had behaved as badly to him as the Doctor had done. The result of this one man's grumbling was that an idea gradually sprang up in the neighbourhood that the Doctor had fled to escape the consequences of his evil doing, though of what his evil doing consisted no one had an idea, even a name was not given to his assumed crime.

Such, narrated in wandering fashion, was the gist of Polly Phybbs' letter, and Frances was fain to admit that there was scant information to be gained from that quarter. The one thing it seemed to point to was that Doctor Lynden had no intention of returning to Manchester; that something might have occurred to necessitate his leaving it temporarily was easy to understand, but it was singular that he had not found time to make his landlord acquainted with his decision.

The weeks slip by, and the Easter of eighteen-fifty-six is at hand. Peace is not proclaimed, but is known now to be an absolute certainty; and as Frances Smerdon thinks over the great drama that is now played out, it all seems to her like a dream. A few months back, and she had felt herself intimately connected with some of those who were playing their parts in it, and now she had no idea what had become of them. Her bosom friend,

Nellie Lynden—Hugh Fleming, Tom Byng—she had lost all knowledge of them. The papers, it is true, still mentioned the doings of the Crimean Army, but the fighting was over, there were no deeds of arms now to chronicle, and the letters of "Our Special Correspondents" were chiefly made up of accounts of their own tours up the country. It was rarely that there was any allusion to particular regiments, and of the doings of the —th she had heard never a word for months. Now it may be remembered that there resided at Manchester a Mrs. Montague, who had constantly acted as chaperone to the two girls. She had never maintained any correspondence with Miss Smerdon, but one morning Frances received a letter from her. She was a well-meaning, frivolous, gossipy woman, but news to her was as the breath of her nostrils. She was never so happy as when either receiving or retailing it, and she had just picked up the story that Hugh Fleming was engaged to be married to a Russian Countess. Like everyone else, she was in perfect ignorance of where Miss Lynden was, otherwise she was just the woman to have at once hastened to condole with her on the infidelity of her lover. Not being able to write to her, she thought the nearest approach to it would be to write to Frances Smerdon, as her most intimate friend. Frances was thunderstruck at hearing such a rumour was current, and her first feeling was one of indignant disbelief. But as she reflected on

Mrs. Montague's news, came the recollection that though that lady was an inveterate gossip, she was for all that a veracious one. That such stories as she might have to tell she had at all events heard and not invented. Still it was hard to believe, so thoroughly in love as Hugh Fleming had been, he had proved faithless in so short a time. Ah, well, she had made as terrible a mistake in her own case, and perhaps she was quite as far wrong in Nell's. Then Frances came to the conclusion that if this was true, well, her friend was well out of her engagement; that a man so fickle as Hugh Fleming was not worth wasting a thought about, but for all that she felt that Nell Lynden would not feel it quite so easy to tear this love from her breast, a love that had cost her such heartache and anxiety during the past year. She longed more than ever to be by her side and comfort her during this fresh hour of trial, and yet she knew that Nell was the last girl to bear with commiseration from anyone in such trouble as this would be to her. There was only one means to inquire into the truth of this report that Miss Smerdon could think of, and accordingly she once more wrote to Polly Phybbs to ask if she had heard anything of her master and mistress. The reply was as before, nothing.

Miss Phybbs at present had her hands tolerably full of her own affairs. Police Constable Tarrant had been blest with another inspiration. What Sergeant Evans had gathered from their investiga-

tion of the laboratory Dick had no conception. That the Sergeant did not think much of his own astuteness, Dick had gathered from his concluding words on that occasion, but it happened to suit him to persevere in the belief that the doctor was guilty of malpractices of some sort. And, as we know, the opinion of the neighbourhood rather favoured that supposition. Mr. Tarrant impressed upon Polly that it was more imperative than ever that strict watch should be kept upon the Doctor's house. He had his own reasons for this, having been suddenly struck with a brilliant idea ; it was perfectly preposterous that he should be paying for his lodgings while such an excellent billet as the Doctor's house was next door to vacant.

"You see, Polly," said Mr. Tarrant, "the way the Doctor went off is in itself suspicious, and of course he'll have to account for himself. When you want to catch a fox watch his earth. Now you see I can't depend upon you ; you've let him slip through your fingers once, and you'd do it again. Of course, for keeping an eye on 'em there is nothing like living in the same house, but then, you see it ain't in you. It ain't your fault, it's not everybody's got the gift of observation."

"I don't believe Doctor Lynden will ever come back."

"Oh yes he will, they always do. Now, I tell you what, my girl. I'm just going to combine business and economy. What do people do when

they go away for nobody knows how long, like Doctor Lynden? What do they do, I say? Why, they puts a caretaker into their house of course, and who makes the best caretaker? A policeman, a man like myself, who is both the guardian of the law and a keen observer. My wages ain't that liberal that I can afford to play ducks and drakes with my money, and it's all nonsense my paying for my lodgings while there's plenty of vacant bedrooms and the run of a tidy kitchen here for nothing."

Now all this gave rise to not only discussion, but considerable altercation between these two. Mr. Tarrant was a man not much given to see beyond his nose, and whose keenness of observation was pretty much confined to what affected his own comforts. Polly, on the other hand, demurred to his becoming an inmate of the household. She pointed out that if she allowed him to come and live there, in the absence of her master, it would give rise to considerable scandal among the neighbours at her expense. This, Mr. Tarrant promptly met with a proposal to marry her at once. Polly was quite aware that this was a piece of imprudence; that she had not money enough yet put by with which to start housekeeping, and it was simply preposterous to suppose Dick had any reserve fund of this nature; that their position at the best would be extremely precarious, terminating of course as soon as the house was tenanted again. But Dick

was obstinate, he argued that there were always plenty of houses to let in Manchester, and that if he once got a start in this sort of employment he should never be out of a job, and so, after they had quarrelled and argued over the subject for some weeks, Polly eventually gave in, and consented to become Mrs. Tarrant during the approaching Easter week. It was all over at last, Miss Phybbs had become Mrs. Tarrant, and Polly, having taken care to obtain the consent of the landlord, in the absence of her master, Dick was duly installed in the berth he coveted, and combined the post of caretaker of Dr. Lynden's house with his official duties.

After poring for some days over the papers he had taken from the Doctor's laboratory, Sergeant Evans felt pretty sure that he had got to the bottom of the Doctor's mysterious occupation.

"I've heard of such a thing," he muttered. "Ah, heard it talked about often since this war began, but I never much believed in it. I've been told often that England is full of Russian spies, and I have very little doubt that the Doctor is one of them, and a top sawyer at the game. All those papers I took away from his laboratory mean that, if they mean anything, but I don't know what use we could make of it, even if I could prove it for one thing, and if we could catch him for another. I have never attempted to follow him up since he left, but he's probably well abroad by this time. I don't know what they'd do with a Russian spy,

even if you took him red-handed. Out there in the Crimea, they shoot such vermin, I believe, but we couldn't do that here; nor do I believe that we could legally hang him. Ah, well, he's gone, and there's no more to be said about it. I take it though, I could make it pretty hot for some of his correspondents if I only knew their names. They are employés in Government offices, I should fancy, many of them, and surely they are liable to punishment. The lady of the roses is the only one I know by sight, and further than that she came from London I know nothing about her. He must have paid well, but even then she doesn't look the sort to mix herself up in such a dirty business. That woman is a real lady, and holding her head pretty high too. Ah, well! given a passion for dress and a craving to take a place in the world, and there's no saying what a woman won't do. Who is she? She's a wedding ring on her finger, I wonder what her husband is! That fellow's most likely high up in the War Office, the Foreign Office, the Treasury or something, and selling Government information to pay for his wife's extravagance, dress and display," continued Sergeant Evans, shaking his head sagaciously. "Ah, dress and display! what a lot of domestic firesides you have bust up to be sure. It don't seem to matter a deal whether the man's on a clerk's stool at a hundred a year, or whether he's in the director's parlour at five thousand. Well, this is all very pretty theory, but it ain't

evidence. I've got the clue in my hand, it wouldn't be difficult to shadow that lady home, and then find out all about them. It's a beautiful case, it's a sin to give it up, it's just lovely ; but then I'm not engaged in it.

"No," continued the Sergeant, "when people want one thing it's no use giving them another. When people are looking for the North Pole it ain't a bit of use sending 'em a lot of valuable information about Central Africa. Scotland Yard wants a coiner ; well, I can only say we don't happen to have the article on hand at present. Scotland Yard must catch him themselves. As for Lynden, he'd doubtless his own reasons for making a bolt of it, though as far as I actually know there was no cause for his going. It's a very pretty puzzle, and I shall always feel sorry that the working it out didn't fall into my hands professionally. As for this Tarrant—how we came to take such a thick-head as that I can't think. I should recommend the Chief to get rid of him at the first opportunity ; and if I know anything about the lazy, good-for-nothing hound, he won't have to wait long for that."

CHAPTER XXII.

"EASTER EGGS "

THE expedition that Byng and Brydon had planned, and of which the ride to Batchi Serai had been only the forerunner, was now on the point of departure.

There were half-a-dozen of them altogether, and they were taking with them a cart drawn by two stout ponies, which conveyed a bell tent for themselves, and a picket tent for their servants, besides rugs and other impedimenta. They were going, as Byng laughingly remarked, like all other fashionable people, into the country for Easter. They had got a week's leave, and the programme was to make their way up to Simpheropol by easy marches, and see as much as they could of that and any other towns before their return. They were to camp out, and so be thoroughly independent of hotels, while as for provisions, there would be no difficulty whatever in procuring them. It was a very pretty little tour, and many of them often looked back in after days to the free life they led, and the week's fun they had when they were campaigning in Russia on their own account, when there were no Colonels or Commander-in-Chief to trouble them, and the only discontented man of the half-dozen was the man who had the middle watch. It was necessary that one of them should always be on guard at night, not that they feared either attack or robbery for themselves, but there was always the chance of one or other of the ponies getting loose and straying a little from their encampment, in which case his recovery would be very problematical.

"Well, I hope you fellows will have a good time," said the Adjutant, who with two or three of

their brother officers, had congregated about the mess-room door to see the expedition start. "By the time you come back we shall, most likely, have heard something about when we are to embark for home."

"Ah, it will take a good while," rejoined Byng, "even when it's begun. Think what a lot of ships it took to bring us all here. Wonder whether they will take home the railroad! If I was a shareholder I should try and sell mine at Simpheropol. Good-bye!" and with that Tom and his companions rode off.

The party were by this all old hands at camp life, the organization had been efficient, and the result was satisfactory in the extreme. As a matter of course they pitched their tent one night on the outskirts of Batchi Serai, and here they counted upon coming across Hugh Fleming and bringing him back to dine with them at least, even if they didn't bring him back altogether. They soon found that the Russians were already withdrawing their troops from the Crimea. Many regiments were on their way to cross the Steppes, indeed several of the officers who had entertained Byng and Brydon a fortnight ago were already gone, so they were informed by a grey-headed old colonel, who told them he had fought against them at Inkermann, and had served at Sebastopol from that day to its fall. From him they learnt that Mademoiselle Ivanhoff and the English officer were

also amongst those who had left the place. Where they had gone to he didn't know.

"We have collected men," he said, "in the Chersonese from all parts of the empire, there was no keeping count of where they came from, any more than there is of where they are going to. My corps came from Moscow. They are on their way back to St. Petersburg, and I follow them tomorrow. Half of them we have left round Sebastopol, and though the weather is fine, the rest have a weary march across the Steppes before them. You are fortunate, gentlemen, your ships will carry you home."

"It's a rum go," said Brydon, after they had said farewell to the Russian Colonel, "but I can't believe but what Hugh Fleming might have rejoined us at any time in the past month if he had wished to."

Byng assented shortly. He was quite of Brydon's opinion, but did not dare to discuss what he considered Hugh's weakness. It all mattered nothing to him. If Hugh chose to jilt his *fiancée* and marry this Russian girl, it was no business of his. He thought his old chum was making a grievous mistake, and that though Mademoiselle might be extremely charming to philander with, Hugh would find she didn't do as a wife.

"Of course, she's a tremendous pull," he murmured. "She nursed him through a deuced bad bout of it, saved his life, and all that, which gives

her a claim upon him, and she struck me as just the sort of woman to rivet such manacles tight. We are all condemning Hugh, and calling him a fool, but very likely none of us would have come out of the thing a bit better. Men often find it difficult to escape an entanglement of this sort, when the lady holds nothing like such cards as chance dealt Mademoiselle Ivanhoff." With such reflections Byng beguiled the way back to their small encampment, he would say nothing to his companions, who, finding that Hugh was not at Batchi Serai, would probably, for the present, dismiss him from their memories, but would take every opportunity that afforded itself of ascertaining whether Hugh had veritably left the Crimea. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was apparently a lady of some note, and when they got up to Simpheropol, he would possibly learn something definite about her movements at all events.

The whole party were all in the highest possible health and spirits, and, as Byng foresaw, the strange conduct of Hugh Fleming had already faded from his companions' minds. Had they not camped on the banks of the Alma and consoled themselves for not being present at that brilliant victory by bathing in the famed stream? At length they pitched their tent in the environs of Simpheropol ; though not nearly so pretty, this was much more of a town than Batchi Serai. The semi-Oriental appearance which marked the capital of the Khans

was absent here. Simpheropol was emphatically a Russian town, and just now thronged with Russian officers, and all that multitude of followers that an army, if stationed ever so short a time, rapidly collects round itself. The hotels, by no means numerous, were crowded, and the party rather congratulated themselves upon their own canvas habitations that made them independent. Easter was in full swing. The churches were thronged, and the bells seemed to peal continually, both day and night. Easter eggs were much in vogue, and more than one, gaily painted and beribboned, was presented to Tom and his friends. They attracted some little attention in the town, not that the British uniform had been an uncommon sight there for the last month, but they were rather a strong party, and when they first rode into the place, many of the passers-by turned to stare at them.

They had lounged into one of the churches the evening after their arrival, and were listening to the solemn swell of the organ in the celebration of Midnight Mass, when Byng suddenly felt his arm touched, and turning round saw a neat-looking peasant girl at his elbow, who, throwing him a meaning glance, slipped an Easter egg into his hand, then breaking another in her own, nodded to him to do likewise, put her finger for a second on her lip, and vanished. Tom quietly made his way out of the church after his mysterious messenger, but at the door she looked back at him, frowned, shook

her head, and signified unmistakably that he was not to follow her. Then, once more making a motion with her hand, as if breaking something, she darted down the street and left Byng standing in the brilliantly lighted doorway of the building. Tom crushed the egg in his hand, as it had been clearly intimated that he should do, and found, as he expected, that it contained a note, and marveling considerably who his unknown correspondent could be, Byng proceeded to run his eye over it.

“If you have a little more strength of mind than most of your sex, take away your friend. There is no keeping flies from the honey, and once cloyed with its sweets they are powerless to help themselves. You know what I mean ; your friend has fallen into the toils, and is but as wax in the hands of Marie Ivanhoff. I would wish no enemy of mine a worse fate than this. Who am I, and why do I interfere? A woman, a woman on whom, in her insolence, Marie Ivanhoff has dared to inflict bitter wrong. She stole my lover from me, and though it is not yet a year since he died gloriously for Russia in Sebastopol, already this Englishman takes his place. Do you know what these Ivanhoffs are? Unscrupulous adventurers, destitute of all sense of honour and principle. The brother a gambler and duellist, the sister an intrigante, who plays with men's hearts as a conjurer with balls. What Marie may purpose to

do with the Englishman I do not know—marry him perhaps, if he is wealthy. To save your friend I would not stir a finger, to thwart Marie Ivanhoff I would spend the last rouble I possess. Captain Fleming is a free man at this moment, although he does not know it. The Jezebel, whose slave he is, has tried to keep back the order for releasing him from his *parole*. If you wish to see him, be in the same place, at the same time, to-morrow night.

"VASHTA."

"Well," thought Tom, after he had read it, "I've always known women to pick each other to pieces a bit, but for command of polished Billingsgate, it strikes me 'Vashta's' about top form. However, whether all she says of Mademoiselle Ivanhoff is true, or, as is very probable, not half of it, the sooner Master Hugh clears out the better for him. I'll be here to-morrow, and, if I can, take him away."

Tom's conclusion, as he came to find out afterwards, was pretty accurate. If Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was a born coquette, and plunged from one flirtation into another, she was very far from as bad as the *soi-disant* Vashta painted her. The two had been fast friends once, but had quarrelled, and there was now bitter enmity between them, enmity, too, of the most malignant kind on the part of Vashta, who lost no opportunity of

magnifying the peccadilloes of the Ivanhoffs into crimes. Alexis Ivanhoff, for instance, was a gambler, certainly, like most of his countrymen, and he had also been out, but professed duellist he was not ; still he gave quite sufficient occasion for his detractors to blacken his character.

At a villa in the environs of Simpheropol a lady was seated looking out across the Steppes, and musing in somewhat melancholy fashion how this episode in her life was to end.

"A few days," she murmured, "and I must set forth for my return journey to St. Petersburg. What am I to do with my Englishman? He is very nice, and I am very fond of him. I'm not very conventional, and not given to be afraid of what the world says, but I can't quite travel over half Russia with a gentleman who is not my husband. Shall I marry him? I can't make up my mind about that."

The door opened, and the subject of her meditations stood before her, one glance at his face told Marie that he knew of her treachery.

"I thought it very odd," he said, "that no answer was made by the Governor to my application. You told me it was always the case with all official business in your country, that those in authority could not be hurried."

"You might have known that all officials expect to be paid for speed."

"You do them injustice. I am told that my freedom was restored to me some days since. How is it that the letter has never reached my hands?"

"How should I know?" she replied, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "The orderly sent with it perhaps got drunk, perhaps lost it. What does it matter?"

"It matters a good deal," he replied quietly, but with a hardness in his tones to which she was totally unaccustomed. "I've business to do in England which brooks no delay."

"You cannot think of that, Hugh, till you have seen me safe to St. Petersburg," she murmured in her softest tones, and with a glance of her dark eyes, calculated to turn any man's head.

Not two minutes ago and she had pretty well made up her mind that she and Hugh must part, but now, all the inborn coquetry of her nature was aroused, and she could no more bear the idea of losing her lover than a cat could bear seeing a mouse escape from its claws. She was, too, just at present, very fond of Hugh, and it had been solely from prudential motives that she had rather sorrowfully come to the conclusion that they must part. Now, passion had conquered prudence, and she had determined to detain him, cost what it might.

"I regret," he said, "that I am compelled to deprive myself of that pleasure. I have no right

to be absent from England an hour longer than I can help. Where is that letter?"

"Hugh, dearest, you will see me to St. Petersburg, will you not?" she replied, gently laying her hand upon his arm, and utterly ignoring his last question.

"Where is that letter?" was his sole reply.

Marie Ivanhoff's eyes began to sparkle, and it was with some little asperity that she rejoined:

"I have told you I know nothing of it."

"Excuse me, you are mistaken. I have been to the Governor's office. I have seen the orderly who brought it. He did not lose it, but delivered it here at this house. I must trouble you to remember what you have done with it."

Mademoiselle recognised too clearly the suppressed anger in his tones. What could it be that made him so anxious to get to England? Was this the man whom she had thought so completely her thrall, so securely compassed by her chains? Could it be possible that she had been beaten at her own game? That this Englishman had been staking counters all the time against her own gold pieces? Her cheek flushed, and the dark eyes flashed ominously, as, still ignoring his question, she asked:

"What is it you are so anxious about in England?"

"To ascertain the safety of one I love," he replied harshly. "The letter?"

"Of one loved dearer than any!" she half unconsciously quoted; and as she spoke the dark eyes gazed into his as if to read his very soul. "Stop; do not speak, I can read my answer in your face," then crossing the room rapidly, she opened an *escritoire*, and exclaimed: "Here is your letter, Monsieur."

"And what right had you——?" he asked fiercely, as he took the letter from her hand.

"Stop!" she cried, drawing herself up to her full height, "spare me further humiliation. Your devotion to me has been all a farce. With your troth pledged to some white-faced English girl you have dared to amuse yourself with me. It is well for you that my brother is not at hand to call you to account for the affront you have put upon me. I have only now, Monsieur, to congratulate you on the complete recovery of your health, and to wish you *bon voyage*," and, having bestowed upon him a stately courtesy, Mademoiselle Ivanhoff swept from the room.

Nothing could be more sarcastic than the inflexion of her voice, as she alluded to the recovery of his health. Hugh could not but recall how much she had contributed to it. What a fool he had been in his wrath to all but blunder out that unlucky rejoinder. Did he want to tear the last shred off the woman's vanity, to whom he, humanly speaking, owed his life. But for such love as there had been between them he had not to hold him-

self much to blame. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was no girl in her teens, but a young lady of wide experiences, and Hugh could honestly say that the temptation most decidedly came from her side in the commencement. He felt uncomfortable, nay, more, to do him justice, he was much distressed at the idea of so parting from his nurse, but he vowed to himself that he would never swerve from his loyalty to Nellie Lynden. Men are apt to be casuists in such matters, but I think it was perhaps as well for Hugh Fleming that Miss Lynden was not called upon to sit in judgment upon his case at the time. The most merciful of women would, I fancy, have thought the offending too deep to be passed over lightly. As for Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, although she was for once defeated with her own weapons, no one could say that her retreat was not conducted with all the honours of war. But don't believe all the same that her quondam friend and betrayer did not know that her thrust had gone home, and exult in her own bower accordingly.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ROYAL REVIEW

MADAME "VASHTA" had been very thorough-going in her vengeance and had written Hugh ample details of the treachery exercised towards him as regarded his correspondence. She was too clever a woman to vilify Mademoiselle Ivanhoff

to quite the extent she had done in her letter to Byng.

"These men are so foolish," she had said to herself. "If I place the whole turpitude of her character before him, he might be hot-headed enough to champion her," so she had confined herself to innuendoes as regarded Mademoiselle Ivanhoff's character, but had been very clear and distinct in her account of the tampering with his letters. He was quite aware, from the talk he had heard amongst Russian officers, that Mademoiselle Ivanhoff had rendered herself a little notorious by her numerous *tendresses*, but that she should have dared to keep back his letters, made Hugh very angry. That the fair "Vashta" had calculated upon, but having still some fears of his infirmity of purpose, she had further arranged that he should meet his English comrades at the church. Hugh employed the day in buying a pony, and in making preparations for his departure. He had heard that there was a party of English officers in the town, but he had not seen them, and did not know whether they belonged to his old regiment or not. He would go back with them if they were returning at once, but go back he would without further delay. Marie had kept her room closely all day, and though he had been in and out of the house he had not seen her since. He would fain have said : "good-bye," and not parted with her in anger, but he would not so far retreat

from his position of righteous wrath as to solicit an interview, and without seeing her again, he set forth, as his correspondent had directed, for the church at which he was assured he should meet his compatriots.

Byng was awaiting him, and after exchanging a hearty hand-grip, the two made their way outside and commenced to pace up and down in the moonlight.

"I thought perhaps it might be you. I was told I should meet some of my own people if I came here to-night."

"Yes, and you will come back with us, won't you?" said Byng. "There surely can be no difficulty, now peace is proclaimed. We expected you two or three weeks ago. Brydon would have it that you couldn't harden your heart to say good-bye to 'Sister Marie.'"

"I'm coming with you at once," rejoined Hugh, "and shall start for England by the first ship that will give me a passage. I've a notion I'm wanted there."

"You're better there than here," said Byng drily, "but come along; we had best fetch your pony, and then you can sleep in our camp, so as to be ready for an early start to-morrow morning."

The next day saw Hugh Fleming and his old comrades of the —th on their way back to Vanoutka. He told them all he had applied for his release on *parole* some weeks back, but by

some mistake he had only received permission to depart on the previous day, and Tom Byng alone was aware of Sister Marie's perfidy. On arrival in camp Fleming lost no time in seeing about a passage for England, and in two days he had bidden his comrades good-bye, and steamed out of Balaklava harbour.

* * * * *

Weeks slip by, the embarkation has begun in real earnest, and every day sees some contingent of the Allied Army marching down to the transports that await them either at Kamisch or Balaklava. Sutlers are breaking up their stores and restaurants, and the luxuries of life vary in price in the most astounding way, according as to whether the proprietors are anxiously getting rid of extensive stores or are very nearly sold out. Boards are sitting on war material, clothing, etc., with instructions to condemn it on the mere shadow of excuse. Ponies that would have been reckoned cheap at twenty pound apiece a few weeks ago, are turned adrift in the streets of Balaklava or sold for as many shillings. There is a fretting for home in the breasts of those whose turn has not yet come, and the anxiety to return to England seems almost as great as two years ago it had been to leave it. There is a feeling that the whole thing is "played out," that the curtain is down, and that there is not much fun in lingering in the lobby for one's carriage. We have been inside Sebastopol, we have gazed upon

the caves of Inkermann, from the Phoros Pass to Yalta, from the Valley of the Tchernaya to the Heights of Mackenzie, from the Palace of the Khans to the banks of the Alma. We have done it all. We have fought the old fights over again until we are sick of discussing blood and carnage. Besides, as Tom Byng says :

“It’s our duty to hurry home, and tell lies for the edification of our friends and relations.”

Hurrah, the transport is in at last, and the order is come for Her Majesty’s —th to march down to Balaklava, and embark on board the steamship Adelaide at one o’clock, and that afternoon saw the regiment steaming down the Black Sea, whilst many a wistful glance was cast back at the fast fading cliffs of the Chersonese as thoughts arose in men’s minds of how many staunch and true comrades were left behind to sleep their last sleep on Cathcart’s Hill, or amongst the numerous graveyards that lie scattered on the plateau. Well might the Colonel say, as he went over the returns of the regiment from its landing to its re-embarkation :

“Thanks to drafts, we are taking home a strong battalion, but we’ve left another behind. I don’t think they’ll be able to say we haven’t *won our spurs* now.”

It might almost have been termed sociable, their homeward voyage. The sea was alive with ships, all down the Mediterranean the signal halyards were constantly going, as they passed or repassed

vessels, all engaged like themselves in the task of bringing the army home. Here they exchanged compliments with a large trooper similarly employed, now they dipped their flag to a French man of war, and anon lowered it to an English monster of the same kind. At last they anchored at Spithead to await their orders. These reached them the first thing the next morning, and directed a disembarkation at the dockyard, with a view to proceeding to Aldershot to take part in the great review that was to be held there by the Queen. The Camp had been in a great measure vacated, to make way for as much of the Crimean Army as it was possible to assemble there. The Camp in those days was of considerably more modest dimensions than it is now, and the accommodation was doubtless stretched to its utmost limits, which gave Mr. Flinn an opportunity of invidiously comparing it with that they had left behind them, and it must be conceded that the huts on the Aldershot dusty plain did appear rather at a disadvantage after the pretty camp at Vanoutka Pass, with the Black Sea smiling beneath it, as it had been when the regiment last saw it. Those few days were spent principally by officers in conferences with hatters and tailors, for absence, except for a few hours, was not accorded until the Royal Review should be over. At length, as many troops as could be laid hands on, or as many as could be got into Aldershot Camp, canvas included, which comes

to the same thing, were collected, the day was fixed, and the Queen, accompanied by Prince Albert and the Prince of Wales, came down from London to review and thank the Army for their services. Half London was there to see, and half Hampshire also, and despite a shower or two the Royal Review was a grand success, and a more ringing cheer than went up from officers and men in answer to Her Majesty's speech has never been heard since, often though the voices of her soldiers have risen to greet her in that Cantonment.

And now, sad to say, a rather severe disappointment was destined to befall the —th. It was well known that they had been brought to Aldershot simply for this occasion, and what their ultimate destination might be was matter of grave speculation with both officers and men. Both, I think, conceived themselves entitled to a bit of a fling on their return, and when they were informed that they were to be quartered at Portsmouth, there was much exultation in the ranks. Mr. Flinn and many of the veterans opined that there was much "diversion" to be obtained in that town, the regiment had been quartered there before, and the old soldiers could speak with authority as to the capabilities of that seaport. But when they detrained there it was broken to them that they were only to remain pending embarkation for Ireland, and that the Curragh of Kildare was their ultimate destiny.

"Faith," said Mickey Flinn when he heard it, "it's the devil's own mess we've made of it, bhoys, by not settling out there. We'd a better camp than ever we're likely to find at home and lashings of everything, that is as far as camps go," but when it was further pointed out to the Colonel by the Brigade Major that they were so pushed for barrack accommodation that for the short time they were to remain there, the only quarters they could assign to the regiment was an empty convict hulk, the ridicule of the situation almost extinguished the disappointment it was. The Queen's thanks, and a berth on board a convict ship, were such an incongruous recognition of their services that both men and officers could not help laughing. "Tear an'ouns," said Mickey Flinn, "'ave I'd only known it would end like this, I'd have qualified for the lodging and enjoyed myself. Oh, murther, to think I almost took the pledge till the review was over, for fear I'd be a disgrace to the regiment, 'deed bhoys, there's no encouragement for virtue and sobriety in this world."

Leave of absence was now granted to as many officers of the regiment as could be spared, and Tom Byng was amongst the first to take advantage of this. As he travelled up to town, he wondered a good deal what had become of Hugh Fleming, and how matters stood between him and Miss Lynden. The sudden cessation of her letters was singular. She knew that he was a prisoner, and

surely she would have written a line to congratulate him on his escape from the very doors of the tomb. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff had no doubt tampered with Hugh's correspondence, but all letters for him from home had been directed as usual to the regiment, and forwarded thence by Byng himself at the first available opportunity. He knew Miss Lynden's handwriting well, and could swear that no letter from her had passed through his hands since September last. Perhaps he should meet Hugh in town. Nobody had heard from him since he sailed for England, it was not to be expected. He would suppose that the regiment had left the Crimea shortly after himself. And then Tom began to meditate over his own immediate prospects, and what were the capabilities of the Curragh of Kildare.

"Well, there's a good spell of leave to start with," he mused, "and that brings me well into the autumn before I have to rejoin, and as for huts we are used to them, and the magnificence of a barrack-room might only appal us. There will be a bit of racing to be done in September and October, and then comes the hunting. Besides it's close to Dublin, and they are a lively lot from all accounts in the Irish capital. Yes, upon the whole I daresay it will do very well. In the meantime I shall make the most of the last few weeks of the season. Go everywhere and see everything! By Jove! I haven't been in a theatre for a twelve-

month, my dramatic taste wants rubbing up woefully."

On enquiry at the Thermopolium, the club to which they were both affiliated, he found that Fleming was in town, and though not in the house at that moment, was there every day. The club was thronged, and though, as a rule, its members were as smartly dressed a body of men as any in London, there were certainly some queer "get ups" to be seen flitting about it now, men who had not found time to renew their wardrobes, and in some instances habited in undress uniforms, from which the first gloss had considerably departed, but it's a question whether the Thermopolium had ever known livelier times than when the Army came home from the Chersonese. Tom Byng soon found himself amongst a knot of old friends, who hailed him gleefully.

"Now he looks fit, don't he?" cried Jim Lockwood, "for a man that was shot through the head, and then fraudulently persisted in doing his regiment out of the step by coming to life again. I *do* call him fit."

"How are you, Jim? Yes, we wintered well this time. Nothing to do and plenty to get, odd if we didn't look well."

"Well, you do, old man," rejoined the Hussar, "but there's one of you I'm sorry to say don't, and that's Hugh Fleming. He used to be up to anything, and now he seems to have no go left in

him, Sits as glum as an undertaker over his wine, and his liquor seems to do him no good. I suppose, poor fellow, he's not got over the mauling he had on the eighth."

"I don't know," said Byng. "I haven't seen him for the last two months."

"Well, there's something wrong with him, he's not the Hugh Fleming he used to be."

A little later Byng encountered the man he was in search of, and the pair speedily drew a couple of chairs into the window of the reading-room, and sat down for a long confabulation.

"Now, Hugh, what's the matter?" asked Byng. "Some of the fellows here told me just now, that you weren't well, I can see you look worried to death, what is it?"

"Well, I am. I don't know what to do, nor what to think; you know how I'm situated; you know I've had never a line from Nellie now for months. As soon as I got home, the first thing I did, was to run down to Manchester to find out what it all meant."

"Well?" said Byng eagerly.

"She and her father have simply vanished. It appears they left their house months ago, quite suddenly, without saying a word to anyone. They have left no address, and nobody can tell me anything about them. There's only an old woman taking care of the house, all I could get out of her was, that she hadn't been there long, that Dr.

Lynden had been gone for months, and that the house was to let. If I went to the landlord perhaps he could tell me more. I tried him, which only resulted in rather strong language between us."

"How so?"

"Well, he knew nothing about Dr. Lynden, wished he did, and he'd have the law of him, he hadn't behaved to him like a gentleman, began to get abusive, and then I cut in, and told him I'd knock his teeth down his throat if he didn't shut up."

"Very natural," remarked Byng, "but hardly perhaps the best way to get information out of a man."

"Then I called upon Mrs. Montague, who was all smiles and smirks, and was she to congratulate me upon having celebrated peace by bringing home a Russian bride? Pleasant, wasn't it?" And Hugh shot a keen glance at his friend.

"Never mind," replied Tom, diplomatically, "let us pass over that episode."

"Then I asked her what had become of the Lyndens. She immediately drew herself up, pursed up her lips, said they'd not taken her into their confidence, that people were so ill-natured, though she never believed half what she heard, that Dr. Lynden had doubtless his own reasons for going away so suddenly. People did talk so, etc., etc."

"And then," said Tom, "you cut in with

another of your knock-down arguments, I suppose?"

"I never felt more like it," rejoined Hugh. "My adieux were a little abrupt, but I did manage to swallow my wrath. Still, there remains the question—What on earth has become of the Lyndens?"

"Nobody is ever lost in these days," said Tom, sententiously. "Why a quiet elderly gentleman should abandon his home, apropos to nothing, I can't imagine, but there's one thing you may rely upon, that now we are once more in England Miss Lynden knows where to write to you. Why, if she only put the regiment and London, it would get to you eventually. If you can't find her, she can find you, if she likes."

"That's just what it is," said Hugh, rising, "she won't. Some garbled version of what happened out in the Crimea has reached her ears. Mrs. Montague wouldn't have been so ready with her congratulations if there had not been some story of the sort flying about Manchester. No, old man, I've got to find Nell, and have it out with her, and you've got to help me."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN FULL CRY.

TOM BYNG was not the man to fail a friend who had claimed his assistance. He had heard Hugh's story, and having briefly arranged that they should

dine together, announced his intention of having a "good solid smoke." Tom had much belief in the virtues of tobacco, and generally sought inspiration from it in some shape when the intricacies of this life seemed too much for him. Having taken an arm-chair in a retired corner of the smoking-room and lit a Cabana of extra size to do justice to the occasion, Tom began to turn the whole thing over in his mind.

"Yes," he thought, "Hugh is right, that's what's the matter. That Sister Marie story has come to her ears and she's fired up, and not without reason, if she knew all. But the girl can't be lost, somebody must have her address. She must be found, things can't come straight between them if they don't meet, and after undergoing all the fears and anxieties of last year about him, it would be pitiable if she threw him over, now he's come home safe, because he indulged in a fool's flirtation out there. There can't be a question about his genuine love for her. By Jove, I have it! Miss Smerdon knows where she is. Hugh must write to her. I'll take odds he never thought of that, he would have said so if he had," and here Tom puffed viciously at his cigar, as he reflected that he could hardly well write to that young lady himself. "There's a bit of a coolness I fancy," he muttered "between us, and I'd best keep out of reach of her sarcastic tongue for the present." And having, as he thought, satisfactorily solved his riddle, Tom

dropped the butt of his cigar into the ash-tray, and proceeded to go for a good stretch before dinner.

When he and Hugh met at that meal, the latter was much struck by his companion's suggestion. Stupid of him not to think of it before ; he would write that very night, so that his letter might go the first thing in the morning ; and then, considerably to Tom's relief, began to talk of other things though even these he discussed with a mind evidently preoccupied, and in answer to his old chum's questioning, admitted that he'd decided nothing as yet about the future, whether to stay in the Guards or exchange, or what.

Hugh's letter was duly written, and a reply was anxiously expected. Miss Smerdon's answer was what Mr. Swiveller was accustomed to designate a "staggerer." Very formally, coldly, and politely, Frances, in a few lines, informed Captain Fleming that she had no knowledge of Miss Lynden's present address.

"That's all nonsense," said Hugh, angrily, as he handed the letter to Byng. "Of course she knows where Nell is. She's got this idiotic Manchester story into her stupid head——"

"Hullo, come, I say, young man, you must really moderate your language a little."

For a few seconds Hugh looked keenly into his companion's face and then smiled as he remarked, "Well, people are very irritating, you know. At

all events you'll admit there's no information to be gathered from that source."

"More to be done perhaps by a personal interview," suggested Tom, savagely.

"May be," said Hugh, speaking quietly and softly. "Suppose you were to undertake it."

"Out of the question," said Tom, hastily. "If you don't see your way there's nothing more to be done there. Miss Smerdon and myself are on very distant terms."

Further discussion led to no fresh suggestion. Tom stood steadfastly by his old axiom that Miss Lynden couldn't be lost, that the finding her whereabouts was only a question of time, probably of a few days, but he did agree with Hugh that the Manchester story was most likely the cause of her withholding her address, and that to put things right between them, it was imperative that Hugh should see her. But how that was to be brought about, neither of them could say.

In the course of the day, however, Tom was seized with another inspiration. Turning the whole thing over in his mind, it suddenly flashed across him that on the day Hugh was taken prisoner, there was a private soldier named Phybbs, who declared he owed his life to him, and that this soldier was also a brother of Miss Lynden's maid. He remembered quite well having some talk with the man, and telling him to write his account of the eighth of September home to his sister.

"Now," thought Tom, "that maid, no doubt, is with her mistress at present, and surely Private Phybbs would know where his sister is living. That's it. Private Phybbs is the key to the whole mystery."

Tom was a man of decision, he rushed into the nearest office and telegraphed to the Adjutant, to know whether the regiment had sailed for Ireland, and whether Private Phybbs was still with it. In less than two hours a yellow envelope was brought to him at the Thermopolium, containing the following message, dated Portsmouth :

"Still waiting for transport. Phybbs here."

Having hastily thrown a few things into a portmanteau, Tom left a brief note for Fleming at the club, saying that he had been unexpectedly called out of Town for a day or two, and by eight o'clock was steaming out of London on his way to the old seaport.

But Hugh also had his inspiration. He came to the conclusion that he had not pushed his enquiries half far enough at Manchester, and what is more, that he had made them in the wrong directions. It was quite likely that some of the shop people with whom they dealt would be able to tell him something about the Lyndens. If his idea was correct about Nell, she would naturally not wish to see or hear from people of her own position. The old woman he had seen at the house was obviously only a caretaker, and indeed said she knew nothing

of the people who had lived there before, except their name. He would run down to Manchester again, and see if he could not discover what he wanted. He could think of nothing else, and it was worth trying at all events. And so it came to pass, while Tom was speeding into Hampshire, Hugh Fleming was being whirled into Lancashire both men strenuously in pursuit of the same object.

The latter began his search in the most methodical way, and with the sternest resolve to keep a check upon his temper, which, before the first day was over, was sorely taxed. The Lyndens had been gone some time, and folks seemed to have forgotten them for the most part, and when they did remember them, it seemed somewhat to their disadvantage, for there seemed to be a hazy impression that they had gone away owing a lot of money. Still, he at last found a respectable tradesman who could tell him something. Yes, he remembered them quite well; they dealt with him almost ever since they first came to live there. As for their owing a lot of money, he didn't believe it; they had always paid him regularly enough. Pity he hadn't come a bit sooner; there were servants in the house for months after they left, who could no doubt have told him what he wanted to know. The parlour-maid married a policeman, he had heard, and that, he supposed, broke the thing up. What had become of the parlour-maid,

he couldn't say. No, he didn't know what her name was now; Miss Phybbs she had been when he knew her.

Good gracious, what a fool he had been! Of course the sister of that boy in his old company. Ah! he wondered where that boy was now; the last time he had seen him was on the ground inside the Redan; he recollected rushing to the defence of Nell's *protégé*. Ah, well, it wasn't much good, it wasn't likely he came out of that business alive. He would certainly write to the regiment and make enquiries, but there was little likelihood that Peter Phybbs was on its roll now. "Married to a policeman," he reflected, as, having thanked his informant, he walked away. "I daresay they could find out his name for me at their headquarters, there's no need for telling them my reasons for enquiring. I certainly don't want to invoke the aid of the police. The most respectable people would get indignant at finding the police laid in their track because they had forgotten to leave their address. No, I must confine my enquiries strictly as to the whereabouts of Miss Phybbs."

On making his desire known at the headquarters of the police, Hugh was at once asked to take a chair by the inspector on duty.

"We can tell you what you want, sir, I daresay, in a few minutes. Mary or Polly Phybbs, you say. A young woman living here, and married some time this spring." And the officer turned to confer

with one or two of his subordinates, and then consulted sundry ledgers.

"Ah," he said, at last, "this would be it, no doubt. Richard Tarrant, married to Mary Phybbs, spinster, April, '56. Leave granted to act as caretaker at Denton Lodge, the residence of Dr. Lynden."

"That's it," cried Hugh. "And now, where are the Tarrants living?"

"If they are not still at that address, I don't know that we can help you. You see Richard Tarrant has left us."

"When and why?" asked Hugh laconically.

"About a month ago. As for 'why,' unless you are finding him a situation it's not worth while going into particulars."

"And you've no idea where he is at present? Is his wife with him?"

"I can tell you nothing more about him, sir, than I have done already. It is possible some of our people may know what's become of him, but I rather doubt it. He was a bumptious, rather queer-tempered man, and not popular in the Force. However, if you'll leave me your address, if I can learn anything I will let you know"

Hugh thanked the inspector and took his leave. He lingered for two or three days at the Queen's Hotel, in hopes of discovering the address of Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant, but, further than that Polly Phybbs had married Richard Tarrant, and spent her honeymoon in Dr. Lynden's old house, he

could learn nothing. He was by this time fairly convinced that the discovery of his lost love lay through Mrs. Tarrant, and clung to the idea with all the persistency of his disposition—but he was just too late. Had he but sought her a month ago, he would have found her without trouble. Tricked he had been in the Crimea it was true, but he was fain to acknowledge to himself that had his senses not been lulled by Mademoiselle Ivanhoff's fascinations he would have made much more stir in that matter of his release. Wearily he travelled back to Town murmuring after the manner of most of us when our sin has found us out, "Too late! too late!" We are never so clear-sighted as to our wrong doing as when experiencing the unpleasant consequences that have come of it.

Tom Byng, on the other hand, had returned to town triumphant. He had gone on board the convict hulk the next morning, found Private Peter Phybbs, and had what Tom deemed a fairly satisfactory interview with him. No, his sister was not with Miss Lynden; whether his sister knew where she was, he couldn't say, but he thought it very likely she did. Since he had last heard from her she had got married; married a policeman, a cousin of theirs. He was afraid she hadn't done a very good thing for herself, for it seemed her husband had left the police, and he thought things must be going a bit wrong with them. He never had thought much of that Dick Tarrant. When

Byng asked him why he took such an unfavourable view of his sister's prospects, he admitted with some hesitation that she had written very gloomily to him a few days ago, and said that now Dick had left the police, she didn't know how they would get along ; that she hoped to see him soon, and in the meantime could he lend her some money ?

"That ain't like Polly, sir. She's a good girl and a careful girl ; but that Dick, he's just one of that loafing sort who'll let a woman slave herself to death, and never do a hand's breadth of work himself. I used to be always at Polly about it. That Dick was always cadging for money out of her savings."

"Well, I suppose you'll go down to see your sister at once ?"

"Yes, sir, I want a furlough as soon as ever I can get one, but you know they say that we belong to the Irish command, and must get our furloughs from the General over there. We didn't think that day in the Redan we'd be put in a convict hulk when we got home, did we, sir ? Have you seen anything of Captain Fleming in London ?"

"Yes, Phybbs. I dined with him the night before last. He's very well."

"Ah, if it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't be here now. Not that it's much of a place to be in," continued Phybbs, throwing a most disparaging eye round the old hulk, "but it's better to be here than nowhere, ain't it, sir ?"

Phybbs' theological ideas were somewhat primitive.

"You'd do anything to help Captain Fleming, eh?" said Tom.

"I'd do anything in the world for the Captain," said Phybbs, earnestly. "I ain't forgot that eighth of September, not likely I ever will."

"Then give me your sister's address, Captain Fleming wants to see her on a matter of great importance."

"I'll run down and get the letter this moment, and if it's anything Polly can do, sir, I'm sure she will."

Phybbs disappeared down the hatchway only to speedily return with Polly's letter in his hand. Having carefully noted down the address, Tom bade his brethren in arms good-bye, and the afternoon saw him once more on his way to London. On arrival at the Thermopolium he learnt that Captain Fleming was not in Town, and that the note he had left for him with the hall porter had never been delivered. Captain Fleming had not been seen in the club either that day or yesterday. Byng had now thrown himself into the search for Nellie Lynden enthusiastically. He had intended to have handed Mrs. Tarrant's address over to Hugh and started him off at once to Manchester, and now, as Tom growled :

"Here's the provoking young beggar not to be found."

He quickly settled in his own mind that if he did not come across Hugh that evening he would go down to Manchester himself on the morrow. It would save time he thought, and enable Hugh to seek an interview direct with Miss Lynden, always supposing that Mrs. Tarrant was in possession of her address.

CHAPTER XXV.

BAFFLED.

IN a decent lodging of one of the poorer suburbs of Manchester, Polly Tarrant sat at the open window, busily engaged in sewing. Already she recognised that the labour necessary for their support would fall mainly upon herself. Dick was by no means estimated by his superiors at the value he placed upon himself. Laxity of duty upon his part brought upon him rebuke, which petulant reply to those administering the "wiggings" did not tend to soften. Continual carelessness on petty points of discipline brought still sharper reprimand. Mr. Tarrant was by no means of the sweetest of tempers, and thought fit to indulge in recrimination with those having authority over him. Had he bowed meekly to reproof, he might have weathered the storm, but defiance to those in command admits of no toleration amongst disciplined bodies; and so, as the Inspector politely put it, Police Constable

Tarrant "left"; he might have added, not altogether at his own request. And not only did Dick by this forfeit the very substantial wages he was receiving in the Force, but that Utopian dream of his, of living rent free, as a caretaker of empty houses, also fell to the ground. As a policeman his position was a voucher for his integrity, but now he was neither of them nor recommended by them. His capacity for regular work was of the frailest, and Polly soon discovered with some dismay that what her husband picked up by odd jobs he for the most part expended on his personal pleasures, whilst for the keeping up of their home she must fain rely upon the proceeds of her needle. She shut her eyes close to the bitter bad bargain she had made, as such women often do. If he was short in his temper at times, well, poor fellow, he had a good deal to worry him, he couldn't help it, there were those inspectors, they had nagged at him until he could bear it no longer, and was obliged to leave the police. Work was hard to come by, and, of course, a clever man like Dick worried at not being able to do more to keep up his home. She stitched harder and harder, and would not see the imperfections of this false idol that she had set up, and made the most of two somewhat negative virtues. He did not get drunk, and he did not ill-use her, so Polly toiled on, and strove hard to hope for better times.

It was a warm summer day, and the cottage

door stood open. Polly, as before said, was sitting at the window, and so engrossed in her sewing that she took no heed of a light footstep that crossed her threshold. The door of her room was ajar, it was pushed gently open, but it was not till a dark shadow fell across her work that Polly lifted her head, and became cognisant of a visitor. For an instant she sat spellbound, looking at the dark-robed figure before her, and then springing to her feet, exclaimed :

“Oh, Miss Nellie, dear Miss Nellie, how glad I am to see you.”

“I’ve been looking for you two or three days,” replied Miss Lynden, bravely. “And if it hadn’t been for cook, I should have been puzzled to find you. Our old grocer told me where she was in service, and she told me you were married, and where you were living.”

“Yes, Miss,” said Polly, “and Dick and me stayed on in the old house as long as they’d let us. But the landlord said we must go at the end of the half-year, and that he would put in a caretaker of his own. Is the Doctor quite well, Miss?” continued Polly, with some slight hesitation, and a quick, nervous glance at Miss Lynden’s black dress.

“My father is no more,” replied the girl, and her lips slightly trembled. “It is that, principally, that has brought me to Manchester. Till the lawyer here who had charge of his affairs has

wound them up, I do not know what I have to live on ; but I'm told it won't be very much. Are you well and happy ? ”

And Miss Lynden's eye already detected that wealth was at all events no ingredient to such happiness as there might be.

“ Yes, thank you, Miss,” said Polly, somewhat hurriedly. “ I brought away what letters there were for you when we left Denton Lodge. I didn't like to leave them with the old lady who succeeded us, and I didn't know where to forward them.”

“ Quite right ; though it's not likely there are any of importance.”

“ None of importance, Miss,” exclaimed Polly, triumphantly. “ Why, there's three from the Crimea ! ” But to the girl's astonishment her young mistress only replied wearily :

“ The Crimea is a thing of the past, and many a dream connected with it. However, get them, all the same.”

Polly's domain consisted of but two rooms, that in which her visitor had found her, like the cobbler's stall, was a combination of kitchen and dining-room, and, although it was summer, there was a spark of fire burning in the grate wherewith to boil the kettle. Disappearing for a moment into the adjoining bed-room, Mrs. Tarrant speedily returned with the letters. There were two or three for the Doctor and five for herself. The first she opened was from Frances Smerdon, imploring

her to let her know where she was. A sweet, womanly letter, which, though touching on the close of the war and the prospect of seeing all their old friends home again, never alluded to her engagement. She pressed Nellie to come and pay her a good long visit at Twmbarlyn, saying she quite yearned for a regular afternoon's gossip with her; but she never mentioned Hugh Fleming's name, and she had never of late omitted to inquire after him in her letters.

"Dear Frances," muttered Miss Lynden, "she knows all, and lets me see she does, but she's too much delicacy to allude to it."

The next letter she opened was that in which Byng had informed her that Hugh was alive, though wounded and a prisoner. She read it attentively.

"Yes," she murmured, bitterly, "it was more manly not to speak till he was sure, than to go away with a lie upon his lips; and after racking a woman's heart-strings for a whole year, do his best to break it in the end. Yes, and here are two of his letters written by his lady-love's side. I wonder whether he gave them to her to read before posting them to the poor fool at home who believed in him."

The third letter Nellie opened was from Mrs. Montague. A commonplace epistle of vulgar condolence, expressing her opinion that Captain Fleming had behaved shamefully, that no man

alive was worth breaking your heart about, that a captain in the army was no such great catch, and that she had never been able to make out that Captain Fleming had any expectations. Up to the reading of this precious note, Nell Lynden's face had been sad and sorrowful, mingled with a slightly contemptuous expression, a feeling provoked by the thought that she should ever have allowed a man to win her love who was so utterly unworthy of it, but Mrs. Montague's commiseration was a very different thing. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes flashed.

"Insolent," she exclaimed, as she rose from her seat, and walked rapidly to the fire-place. "The idea of a woman like that presuming to pity me. I knew it, I was sure of it, all the people I knew here are laughing at me; it is always the case when a girl is as shamefully treated as I have been. They pardon the offender, and laugh at his victim. Ah! Hugh!" she continued, as her voice softened; "it was but a sorry jest, to make a fool of a girl who knew no more of the world than I did. You might have had some little mercy. God help me! lover and father both gone," and at the thought she could not repress a sob. "Tears, you fool," she continued—"what have you to do with tears from henceforth? It is time this farce was finished," and as she spoke she tossed the whole packet of letters, including the two from Hugh, unopened, into the fire.

Polly Tarrant listened with open eyes to her young mistress's rhapsody, but when she saw those two letters cast unopened into the flames, she was literally petrified with amazement. She knew the handwriting of those two letters only too well. Last year, if there was a probability of anything arriving in that hand, Miss Lynden had often forestalled herself in answering the postman's knock. She had seen them read and re-read, and now, as Polly expressed it—"she's a-treating them like trade circulars."

"Polly!" said Miss Lynden, turning almost fiercely round upon her, and speaking in low, hurried tones, "I daresay you've heard me laughed at, I daresay you've heard all sorts of horrid things about me and my poor father——"

"Indeed, Miss," interposed Polly, "I haven't heard a word against you, except from the landlord, who was always growling at the poor Doctor about that half-year's rent."

"Don't interrupt me," continued Miss Lynden. "I'm going to write you down my lawyer's address. You must go up to the old house now and then, and any letters that may come for me or my poor father you will take to him. And through him you can write to me yourself occasionally, but remember that you are to deny all knowledge of me to everyone. Let no one know of any way in which a letter can reach me. For months and years," and she glanced at her dress, "this will be

my excuse for close retirement. I want to forget —ah! I have so much to forget. Never speak to me of the Crimea again. Let that terrible year be as if it had never been; let no one know that you have seen me. And now I must say good-bye. You promise faithfully to do all I have asked?" and Polly, who was genuinely attached to her young mistress, and by this time dissolved in tears, although she did not understand about what, willingly faltered forth the required pledge.

"Once more, good-bye," said Miss Lynden. "I had no chance of giving you a wedding-present before, so you must take this and buy yourself something now;" and as she spoke Miss Lynden slipped a bank-note into Polly's hand, pressed it, and was gone.

Polly sat down and enjoyed the luxury of a good cry with her cup of tea; and I have feminine authority for saying that there is much enjoyment in a "good howl." What she was crying about Polly was not very clear, but I have also a suspicion that that is by no means necessary for its thorough appreciation. Her old master was dead, and her young mistress was in trouble, and it was very kind of Miss Nellie to give her five pounds as a wedding-present, and then Polly's thoughts wandered off as to what she should do with it. I have an idea that she did not consult her husband on this point, having already learnt that the knowledge of any such windfall was best kept to herself.

She did not know quite what had happened, but one thing was clear, Miss Nellie never wished to hear of the Crimea, or of Captain Fleming again. She wondered what had gone wrong between them, but of one thing she was resolved, and that was to adhere firmly to the promise she had given.

Only two days had elapsed, Polly as usual was sitting in the window, once more immersed in her sewing, when the sharp crunch of a man's boot on the gravel caused her to raise her head. Another moment and an impatient tap on the door betokened another visitor. She opened it, and found herself face to face with Major Byng. She recognised him at once and knew what errand he had come upon. It was all very well for Miss Nellie to have done with the Crimea, but the Crimea hadn't done with Miss Nellie. She curtseyed, put forward a chair, and asked Byng to sit down.

"Well, Mrs. Tarrant, how are you?" said Tom. "You recognise me, of course?"

"Oh, yes, Major Byng, and I'm very glad to see you back safe again, after all you have gone through."

"Thank you; yes, we had some roughish times out there. But you've got married since I last saw you. I congratulate you, and as an old friend you must accept a gift from me upon the occasion," and Tom attempted to force a liberal *douceur* into her palm, but Polly hastily stepped back a pace or two, and putting her hands behind her, said:

"I thank you very much, sir, but I cannot take your money."

"Why should you refuse a wedding present from me?" asked Tom, in no little astonishment.

"No matter, sir, I have my reasons, thank you very kindly all the same."

"Of course, you must do as you like, but it's rather a slight upon an old friend," said Tom, smiling, "more especially one who has come all the way from London to see you."

"Oh, no, you have not, sir," said Mrs. Tarrant, looking decidedly obstinate, and, as Tom said afterward, "most confoundedly knowing, to boot."

"There you're wrong, for I have come from London to see you. I have come to ask you a question."

Mrs. Tarrant made no attempt to help him out, but waited quite demurely till it pleased him to speak.

"I want to know where Miss Lynden is at present."

"I don't know, sir," replied Polly, somewhat equivocally.

"But you know her address?" said Tom, sharply.

"I don't admit I do, and if I did, I wouldn't tell you."

"She knows it perfectly," thought Tom to himself.

"When did you see her last?" he enquired,

with what he deemed much forensic ability, but the result rather startled him, for Mrs. Tarrant suddenly drew herself up defiantly, and replied :

“Look here, Major Byng, I’m not in the witness-box, and I haven’t married a police constable without having learnt that what I say may be used against me. Where is Miss Lynden now ? I don’t know. What’s her address ? I don’t know. When did I see her last ? I don’t know. But I have every reason to believe,” concluded Polly, with indignant partisanship, “that she desires to have seen the last of you, *and all of you*, and may be it would have been better if she had never seen the first of you either.”

And now Tom committed a fatal error. Mrs. Tarrant had gradually lashed herself into a very pretty fit of virtuous indignation, and in a vain endeavour to calm the storm, he prefaced his next speech with, “My good woman.” This was pouring oil upon the fire ; there was never an angry woman yet that this epithet did not goad to madness. It is galling, when you have given a loose rein to all the devil in your nature, to find it ignored, and be blandly addressed as “good.” Mrs. Tarrant was no exception to the rule, and indulged in a most uncomplimentary diatribe against the Army generally, expressed her opinion that it was a great pity that those who went to the Crimea hadn’t stayed there, and that they ought to be ashamed to show themselves in Manchester,

they ought. Still, amidst all this flow of language, Polly gave no clue to the cause of it, and Byng, at last convinced that there was no information to be obtained from her, was only too glad to fly from the storm he had raised.

"Well," he thought, as he tramped back, "this is a devil of a sell. There is no doubt she knows where Miss Lynden is, and what her address is, but she's determined not to give it. I thought I was going to carry back such a bit of good news to Hugh. I wonder whether I bungled the business, whether offering her money at starting put her hump up? Thought I did it diplomatically, too—however, when a woman won't, she won't, and there's an end of it, and if ever a woman said 'shan't tell,' and meant it, it's Polly Tarrant. By Jove," he continued, taking out his watch, "I'm too late to go back to Town to-night; luckily I've got a portmanteau at the station. I'll send for it, and get a bed and dinner at the Queen's."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AMBASSADOR.

ALMOST the first man that Byng encountered in the hall of the Queen's Hotel was Hugh Fleming, and having given the necessary directions about his portmanteau, he at once bore him off to the smoking-room, to hear the account of his doings and disasters since they last met.

"It's something, you know," said Tom, as he came to the end of his narration, "to have got this far. We've found Polly Phybbs that was, and I've ascertained that she knows all about it. Now the thing is, to make her speak. She won't for me, that's quite clear. Miss Lynden's dead full against you, and you've no chance of making it up with her, unless you meet her face to face. Mrs. Tarrant takes her late mistress' part, and is an out and out partisan and no mistake. I don't know what chance you have, but you'll have to try; I don't see anything else for it."

"No, I must do my best," said Hugh. "I knew her a bit better than you did, and of course she knew Nellie and I were engaged. It's quite possible she was indignant with you, because she thought I ought to have been there in your stead. Heaven knows I should have been, if I could have found her. I've been vainly trying to, for the last three days."

So it was finally settled between them, that Hugh should try what he could do with the implacable Mrs. Tarrant.

Though that lady gave a little start of surprise when Fleming presented himself the next afternoon, still there was defiance in every fold of her dress, contemptuous obstinacy in every line of her countenance. Neither money nor argument should wring Miss Nellie's secrets out of her; and if they insisted in worritting her in her own house, well they should have a bit of her mind, that was all.

If Miss Nellie was above telling Captain Fleming what she thought of him, she wasn't. She frigidly acknowledged Hugh's greeting, and placed a chair for him, but it required no penetration to see that though at present on the defensive, she was prepared to assume the aggressive on slight provocation. Hugh wasted but short time on preliminaries, but came to the point at once. Would she give him Miss Lynden's address? He did not question whether she knew it; would she give it him? And Mrs. Tarrant's reply was, "not if she knew it," in every sense of the phrase. In vain did Hugh attempt to cross-question her. She would admit nothing, and gave palpable signs of becoming peppery under the operation. Quickly retrieving his false step, Hugh urged that he was engaged, as she knew, to Miss Lynden; that he had just returned from the Crimea, hoping to marry her, and that he could hear nothing of her; that she was withholding her address from him under a most erroneous impression; that there had been an infamous lie circulated about him in Manchester—could Mademoiselle Ivanhoff but have heard that! that this lie had probably reached Miss Lynden's ears; that it had already occasioned him infinite unhappiness; that he had, at all events, a right to demand an interview, if it was only to justify himself in her eyes—rather high a tone this, to take, under the circumstances—now would she give him Miss Lynden's address?

No, she would not ; but though Polly was still inflexible in her refusal, she had softened very much in her manner. Hugh pleaded well, and Mrs. Tarrant was not insensible altogether to the titillation of acting as proxy for her mistress, in a good, strong love scene. She could not help thinking that if she had been Miss Nellie she would have, at all events, heard what Captain Fleming had got to say for himself. Whatever it was Miss Nellie thought he had done, it seemed they had been telling lies of him. But no ; she had promised her young mistress, and she would be true to her word. Hugh at last saw that it was useless ; he was conscious that he had progressed rapidly in Mrs. Tarrant's good graces, but he saw that she was quite inflexible in her determination to tell him nothing whatever about Miss Lynden.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Tarrant," he said at last, "you've no doubt good reasons for refusing to give me her address, but you are wrong, and before long Miss Lynden herself will tell you so."

As he uttered the above words, a man's head was suddenly thrust in at the open window, which, as Hugh at once guessed, belonged to Mr. Tarrant.

"I heard you'd a visitor," said Dick, "as I came up the path, so I just looked in to see who it was. All right, sir, I'm coming in," and as he spoke Mr. Tarrant withdrew his head, and in another minute entered his own abode, and looked enquiringly at the intruder.

"This is Captain Fleming, Dick," said his wife. But this apparently conveyed nothing to Mr. Tarrant's mind.

"He came to enquire after—" and here Polly hesitated a little—"after Doctor Lynden."

"So I heard," replied Mr. Tarrant, with the same stupid stare of amazement on his face. Suddenly a light seemed to break in upon him. "Beg pardon, sir," he exclaimed, "but you're the young gent who used to come sweethearting after Miss Lynden. Captain Fleming, of course. I'd forgot, Polly. Bad business, sir. Ah, that Doctor was no better than he should be."

"Dick," flashed out his wife indignantly, "how can you say such things? It's downright wicked to say such things of a man that's dead."

"Dead!" ejaculated Hugh. "Dead! are you sure, Mrs. Tarrant? How did you hear it?"

Polly felt as if she could have bitten her tongue out for the way it had betrayed her. For a moment she hesitated, and then said, somewhat confusedly:

"I forget now. I read it in the papers, I think, somewhere."

"Why you never told me a word about it," said Dick. "If you saw it in the papers, it would say where he died," continued Mr. Tarrant, with a cunning look, "and I think this gentleman said something about behaving liberal to anyone who could give him Miss Lynden's address."

"I've told Captain Fleming I don't know it," returned Polly, glancing uneasily at Hugh.

"If what you tell me is true," said Fleming, "I am more sorry than ever that you don't know it. Some of Miss Lynden's friends ought to be with her in her affliction. If by chance you should hear of it in the course of the next two or three days, perhaps you will send it me at the Queen's Hotel. Good-morning," and with that Hugh, more thoroughly convinced than ever of Polly's knowledge on the point, left the house. He had not got clear of the tiny garden before he heard a footstep behind him.

"Look here," said Mr. Tarrant, "I ain't been an intelligent officer in the police force without having learnt a thing or two. Don't you believe her, sir. I don't know what her little game is, but she knows all about those Lyndens and where the young lady is. You want her address; leave that to me, Captain Fleming. Information's worth paying for. I'll leave that to you, sir. Queen's Hotel. All right, sir; good-morning;" and Dick turned back into his cottage, determined that Polly should tell him all she knew at once. But in this Mr. Tarrant was destined to meet with disappointment. Polly had hitherto yielded implicitly to him, but for once she was adamant. Let him bully or wheedle as he might, and Mr. Tarrant tried both, she still persisted in her negation, and Mr. Tarrant waxed exceeding irritable at the idea

of his wife's trumpery scruples and Captain Fleming's gaping purse-strings.

Rather a gloomy conference was held by the two friends when Hugh returned from his bootless visit. It was no use having ascertained that Mrs. Tarrant possessed the knowledge they wanted, if they could not make her speak. They came to the conclusion that unless her husband's influence prevailed there was nothing to be got out of Polly. As Byng remarked, "He was of no further use there," and so it was settled between them that he should return to London while Hugh should still remain at the Queen's on the chance of hearing from Mr. Tarrant. Tom indeed was anxious to get back to Town to carry out a new idea that he had got into his head. His ideas had so far disappointed him, and he was more than ever impressed with the advisability of keeping them to himself. He had bethought him of another power wherewith to overthrow Mrs. Tarrant's obstinacy. He determined to send for Private Phybbs and insist on his requiring this service of his sister, on behalf of the man who had saved his life. It would probably have made no difference, but he cursed his stupidity for not having played this card during his interview with Polly. He had guessed that Hugh had probably made the same omission, from motives of pride. Men who do these things are not much given to bragging of them afterwards, or else in their conversation in the Queen's Hotel.

Tom had told Fleming how he had discovered Mrs. Tarrant's address, and he was therefore aware that Phybbs got through the eighth of September safely. Indefatigable in his friend's service, Tom, having ascertained by telegraph that though the transport for them was in, the —th had not yet sailed, rushed down to Portsmouth by the first train the next morning, and upon giving the Colonel a rough statement of the case, obtained a furlough for Private Phybbs, and bore him back triumphantly to Town in the afternoon, telegraphing to Hugh to hold on at Manchester. He explained to Private Phybbs what was required of him—that if he considered Captain Fleming stood by him on the eighth of September, it was his bounden duty to stand by the Captain now he was in trouble. That if he owed his life to the Captain, this was his time to show himself sensible of it; and having thus primed him, Tom dispatched Phybbs to Manchester by the earliest train he could find, and then, like any other great strategist, sat down to await the results.

But for Byng's telegram, not hearing anything from Mr. Tarrant, Hugh would have probably left Manchester, and passed Phybbs on his way. As it was, he took charge of that young soldier, and decided to wait and see what came of his interview with his sister.

Polly was honestly delighted to see her brother. His last letter had given her no expectation of his

obtaining a furlough for at least another month. She was very fond of Peter, and had made a great pet of him as a boy, as sisters often will with brothers a great deal younger than themselves, and she had cried very bitterly when she first heard that he had taken the shilling, and was for the wars bound. It had been a slight feeling of relief to find that he was in the same regiment with Mr. Fleming, who, she had vaguely thought, might befriend the boy. She was quite as conscious of the great obligation they lay under to him as her brother himself. If not from his own lips, she had it under his own hand, that if Peter was alive now it was thanks to Hugh, and it had tried her sorely to refuse Fleming the information for which he had pleaded so earnestly and well. But Miss Lynden's injunctions had been most positive.

"Now, Polly, I've a great favour to ask of you," said Peter, after the first tumultuous hugging and kissing had been got over.

"What's that?"

"Why it's about Captain Fleming, you know."

"Not that, not that," said Polly, hurriedly. "He hasn't sent you here to ask me that? He knows I can't tell you. He knows the secret isn't mine, or I would tell him at once."

"But look here, Polly, you know the Captain stood by me once?"

Polly nodded assent.

"Well, I swore to myself that night that if ever

I got the chance to do anything for him, I'd do the best I could for the man who saved my life in the bloodiest day I was ever in. Well, Polly, I ain't had much experience in sweethearting you see; since I 'listed my time's been spent in the Crimea, and on board a convict hulk, where there wasn't much opportunity, but I've heard men take the loss of a sweetheart terrible hard—now I'm told the Captain is in a fair way of losing his, and all because he can't see the young lady. Major Byng tells me you can manage it for him if you choose, and I shall call it real mean of you if you don't. You know what he wants you to do, now why don't you say you'll do it."

"I can't, I can't indeed. I tell you I promised not!"

"What's that got to do with it?" replied Peter angrily. "Promise indeed! I'd break any amount of promises if the Captain told me to. Promise—why I'd break all the Ten Commandments if the Captain wanted it—besides, Miss Lynden herself will thank you for breaking that promise."

"How do you know?" said Polly.

"Major Byng told me so."

"And how does he know, I wonder?"

"Well, I'm sure. Wouldn't a major in the British Army know better than the likes of us about that or anything else?"

"Don't tell me," rejoined Polly, with a contemptuous toss of her head; "a woman knows more

about that sort of thing than any ten men that ever stepped."

"But I tell you," persisted Peter, that it's all a mistake. Miss Lynden's mistaken."

"What about?" said Polly, curtly.

"How should I know? Major Byng says she is, and that the mistake would be put right in five minutes if Captain Fleming could only see her."

"But Miss Lynden doesn't want to see him."

"How provoking you are, Polly. Don't I tell you it's all a mistake, and how can you tell Miss Lynden don't want to see Captain Fleming until you let her know he is here?"

At last Polly was staggered. There might be something in this. She would be true to her promise, but she did not think there could be any harm in letting Nellie know that Captain Fleming was in Manchester seeking for her. And this much she told her brother she was prepared to do. But the ambassador had been too well coached in his duties by Byng to be satisfied with such a poor concession as that. He had, moreover, conceived a strong personal attachment to Hugh, independent of the feeling that he was indebted to him for his life. He was very resolute to help the Captain to the very best of his power, and still urged his point with the utmost obstinacy. But Polly was staunch to her promise, and would not give up the coveted address. A compromise was, however, at last effected between them, and Mrs. Tarrant consented

to forward a letter from the Captain which would be placed in her hands.

With that assurance Peter returned to his principal, and judging by the time that Hugh took over that composition it was perhaps as well that no stipulation had been made as regarded its length.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WHAT SHALL I DO?"

SELFISHNESS, the philosophers tell us, is at the bottom of all our actions ; that even those few good deeds upon which we look back with pleasurable pride and satisfaction have been prompted chiefly by the desire of gratifying our vanity or dazzling our neighbours. I am no upholder of this cynical creed myself, though nobody can deny that the sin of ostentatious benevolence is rife in the land. Still I am sadly afraid that Tom Byng's strenuous exertions on behalf of his friend were not altogether disinterested. He might not be conscious of it himself, but lurking somewhere in the recesses of his mind must have been the thought that if his most intimate friend should marry the most intimate friend of Miss Smerdon, that he and Frances would shortly come together was pretty well as certain as that two and two make four. He certainly had worked hard to bring that marriage about, and that he should be awaiting news from

Manchester with considerable impatience was only natural. He knew that Hugh's letter had been dispatched and forwarded, and yet the days slipped by without his getting a line from him.

But if Byng was anxious as to what Miss Lynden's reply might be, it was nothing to the impatience which possessed Hugh. Not a day passed but what he visited the Tarrants' cottage only to receive a negative shake of the head from Polly in reply to the inquiry if there was "anything for him." He had bestowed *largesse* on Dick with so liberal a hand that that worthy pronounced him "quite the gentleman." He would have rewarded Polly in similar fashion, but she obstinately refused to touch his money, saying that whether she had acted rightly or wrongly it should never be said that she had "done it for money." He tormented her a good deal as to whether she was sure she had made no mistake about the address, and to quiet him, Polly was forced to explain that though she knew an address to which a letter directed would eventually reach Miss Lynden, she could not tell where it would be forwarded, and that, for all she knew, it might have to go abroad. Hugh, too, was very anxious to learn some particulars of Dr. Lynden's death, but about that Polly could tell him nothing. She had his daughter's own word for it that he was dead, and that was all she knew.

A week had elapsed, and still Polly only shook

her head. What to do or what to think Hugh did not know. He did not like to leave Manchester until he had received his reply, and as to where Miss Lynden actually was, it was quite evident the secret was still her own, and that Mrs. Tarrant could not have betrayed her if she would. He walked up as usual one morning, and noticed carelessly that the window, contrary to custom, was closed. The door opened before he could knock, and Polly, arrayed in her bonnet and shawl, stepped eagerly into the passage.

"Go in," she whispered, "I shan't be back for an hour at least. Good luck to you, sir," and with these words Mrs. Tarrant vanished. Hugh paused for a moment. His chance was come at last; he was there to plead his cause and to win it, he earnestly hoped, but for all that he was conscious that he was going into court with hands not quite clean. He pushed open the door, and Nellie Lynden, in her sombre draperies, stood before him.

"Hugh," she said, in tones that she vainly endeavoured to render steady, "I have come to hear from your own lips the truth. I have travelled from France to hear you give the denial to this story I have heard about you, with your own mouth. You could not stoop to lie to a woman still standing in the shadow of her father's grave."

"My dearest Nellie," he cried, advancing as if to embrace her.

"Stop, Hugh," she said sadly. "I must have a

full explanation from you before I decide whether we meet now for the last time or not. Three times have I thought that I should never see you more, and the last time was immeasurably the most painful of the three. I had wept for you and mourned for you as dead, when the terrible news came home that you were missing after the 8th of September, that no tidings could be gained of you, but—stop, don't interrupt me," she exclaimed as Hugh once more attempted to take her hand; "the saddest parting of all was the last, when I was told you were false to every vow that you had made me, and that the man for whom I had prayed for the last year, and who had cost me so many tears, had forgotten me, and was on his way home wedded to another woman."

"It was all false, false as can be," cried Hugh, conscience-stricken at the torture to which he had subjected his betrothed. "Who put this abominable rumour about I don't know, but if ever I do, and it's a man, he will render strict account to me for the lie he has uttered. How it reached your ears I don't know, but the first I heard of the calumny was from Mrs. Montague."

A slight smile passed over Miss Lynden's face at the recollection of that lady's epistle.

"My father's information about things in the Crimea was both extraordinary and accurate. Was there not a Mademoiselle Ivanhoff?"

"Yes," returned Hugh, "and that is the lady

with whom my name has been so falsely coupled. But I am neither married to her nor have I ever been engaged to her. I was and am pledged to you, Nellie, and anxious as ever to claim my bride as soon"—and he paused, and glanced at her dress, "as I can obtain leave to."

"And you are sure that you have no feeling for Mademoiselle Ivanhoff? She nursed you through your long illness, did she not?" and as she put the question Miss Lynden watched her lover's face keenly.

"Yes, Sister Marie's nursing no doubt had a good deal to say with my pulling through. The doctors all said I owed as much to her care as I did to their treatment."

It's possible that Miss Lynden had her own misgivings as to how far feelings of gratitude had carried Hugh with his nurse, but after all the rumours she had heard, if was a triumph to find her peccant lover still at her feet. She knew that patients at times do conceive a *tendresse* for their nurses, and in her delight at finding he was still her very own Hugh she was disposed to ignore such frailties as might have befallen him in his days of convalescence, but she would hardly have been a woman if she had omitted to ask the one question:

"Is Mademoiselle Ivanhoff pretty?"

And Hugh would have been the veriest fool if he had replied otherwise than:

"No, I don't think so, but I have heard men call her good-looking."

Ah, Madame Vashta, if you could only have heard that one little speech, how delighted you would have been with the results of your handiwork.

By this time Hugh had not only obtained possession of her hand, but might be said to have taken possession of Miss Lynden generally, for she was clasped in his arms and he was pressing passionate kisses on her unresisting lips.

"Do be quiet, Hugh," she said, at length releasing herself from his embrace. "Sit down do, and tell me all that has happened to you since you were taken prisoner."

"My darling, I haven't seen you for so long, and I feared I had lost you."

"Now do be rational. I am sure if all the other young men that have been to the Crimea are making up for lost time as quickly as you, their sweethearts have nothing to complain of. Now tell me exactly what happened to you after you were struck down in that dreadful Redan."

"I have not much recollection of the first part of it," replied Hugh. "I have an idea of feeling very ill and only wishing people would let me alone, but when I first came fairly to my senses I was with half-a-dozen others in one of the country carts, suffering great pain and tortured with the most horrible thirst. I fancy I was off my head a good

bit after that, for my memory seems all a chaos from then, until I found myself in bed in the hospital at Batchi Serai, awfully weak, and feeling nothing but a languid curiosity as to where I was and how I got there. From that there's nothing much to tell. I slowly came round as men do after a long illness, and when I was really about again, found myself a prisoner in the capital of the old Tartar Khans. The Russians were all very kind to me, but life there was pretty much what it is in all country towns, dull and monotonous."

"And this Mademoiselle Ivanhoff nursed you?"

"Yes, and a very devoted nurse she was to me and many others," replied Hugh judiciously. "We parted, I am sorry to say, on not very good terms, and it's not likely I shall ever see her again. But now, Nellie, it is time you told me something of your proceedings. Your father's death, for instance—how did that happen? Was he ill long?"

"It was horrible," said the girl with a shudder. "It was at Boulogne, only a month ago. There was nothing the matter with him. He went out to smoke a cigar on the pier, as he had done two or three times before. I went to bed, and when I awoke the next morning I was told that he had been found in the water quite dead. The whole case was at once taken possession of by the police, and there was a rigid enquiry as to how he got into the water. But nothing ever came of it. There was a heavy bruise on his temple, most

likely caused by his striking against one of the piles. It was a darkish night, and my belief is that he accidentally walked over the side of the pier, was stunned by the blow on the head he received when falling, and so was drowned almost without a struggle. There were vessels lying close by, and sailors and so on were about all night, but no one heard his cry for help. I only know poor papa perished without a hand being stretched out to save him." And a tear or two trickled down Miss Lynden's cheeks, for one who, though not a sympathetic, had always been an indulgent father to her.

"I am very sorry for the poor Doctor," said Hugh "it must have been dreadfully sad for you, Nell."

"Yes," replied the girl softly, "for I thought I was left all alone in the world."

"Ah, but you know that is not so," rejoined Hugh, gently pressing her hand. "You were mistaken about that. But what made you leave Manchester so abruptly, without telling any one where you were going?"

"I don't know. Our life has been a puzzle to me from that time to my father's death. We left, as you would say, without beat of drum, remained a day or two in London, and then crossed at once to the Continent, where we wandered up and down with no conceivable motive. Papa briefly explained he had business here and business there, but what his business was he never confided to me. Our wan-

derings seemed to be perfectly aimless, and after the fall of Sebastopol papa seemed to be more restless than ever. As I have already told you, his information about things in the Crimea was wonderful, and I did think," she added, smiling fondly on her lover, "marvellously accurate. It was he who told me you were engaged to be married to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. Perhaps the wish was father to the thought, for he never liked the idea of my marrying you. I don't know why."

"Ah! you see, Nell, my people didn't receive the news of my engagement to you with much cordiality. I dare say the Doctor thought that my father might have written to him more effusively on the subject. Bless him, he didn't know that dear old gentleman when things are not going to his liking."

"Oh, but, Hugh, what does he—what do all your people think of our engagement now?"

"So far," rejoined Fleming, "they haven't had any occasion to think about it. As I didn't get killed, and contrived to be mentioned in dispatches, they were bound to kill the fatted calf for me during my brief visit, and, as I had completely lost you, there was nothing to be said about you."

"But what will they think of it now, Hugh?"

"Well, the governor won't like it; but then as he wouldn't like my marrying anybody unless she had unlimited shekels, that's not worth consider-

ing. If she had only heaps of money I might marry a Hottentot. But then you see I've got to live with her, not him."

"But, Hugh, what shall I do? I have no one to advise me."

"Do, darling? marry me quite quietly in two or three months and then, you see, you will always have someone to advise you," a bit of special pleading which brought a smile to Miss Lynden's lips. "Now that settled," continued Hugh, "how is Miss Smerdon? What makes her so huffy? There's no pleasing her. We've done our best to blazon the colours, and paid pretty dearly for the right of carrying 'Sebastopol' on them."

"I don't understand you. Why, where did you meet her?"

"I haven't met her," rejoined Hugh, "but I wrote to her to know where I could find you."

"Ah, she couldn't tell you because she didn't know."

"No, but she needn't have answered me as if I was almost a stranger, considering the terms we were on before I left England."

"I think I can explain all that," said Miss Lynden, laughing. "Frances is a very warm *friend*, and I had a most affectionate letter from her the other day, but she was not going to encourage young men in marrying Russian countesses."

"You haven't seen her, I suppose, since you left Manchester?"

"No, nor heard from her until the other day, but why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Hugh carelessly. "We used to think, you know, there was something between her and Tom Byng."

"Yes, but I'm not clear that anything will come of it now. She wrote to him when we all thought he was so badly wounded, and though I never saw his reply I know very well what it must have been. 'She railed at herself that she should be so immodest as to write to one she knew would flout her.'"

"Yes. Tom has kept a very still tongue on that subject ever since that letter. But, Nell, he has stood by me in my search for you like a brick. He has taken no end of trouble, and it was he, you know, who really found out your address after all."

"He has always been a staunch friend to you," replied Miss Lynden, "from the day that I first set eyes upon you when he was coaching you in your match."

"Dear old Tom, I should never have won it but for him. If we find they are still in earnest, we must manage to put things straight between them," and here a discreet rattling of the latch warned them of the return of Mrs. Tarrant.

"You said you wouldn't be back for an hour," said Fleming reproachfully, as Polly entered the room.

Mrs. Tarrant threw a look of the liveliest satis-

faction at the lovers, and replied smilingly as Hugh rose to go :

"Indeed, Captain, I have been away much nearer two hours than one."

Hugh murmured mendaciously something about the difference of clocks, while affecting to consult his own watch, and then prepared to escort Nellie back to the lodgings at which she was staying. As he bid Mrs. Tarrant good-bye, she said in a low voice :

"You've offered me a present, Captain Fleming. You shall give me a new bonnet to wear at the wedding."

"That I will," replied Hugh, "the very smartest you can find in Manchester," and as the pair walked away together, Polly felt that Major Byng did know something about these things after all.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"LOVE MUST BE REQUIRED."

SERGEANT EVANS, when he had once convinced himself that Dr. Lynden was decidedly not engaged in the manufacture of base money, looked upon his avocations as no longer any business of his. He had little doubt what the Doctor was, in his own mind ; but granted he was a Russian spy, still the Sergeant did not see exactly how he was to interfere in the case. Criminals of all classes he had tracked and hunted down, there was

no offence against the law of which he was not thoroughly cognisant, but he did not see under what head the Doctor's offence could be classified. It was a crime not mentioned in the statute-book, and therefore the Sergeant finally concluded it was no affair of his, and that, especially as the culprit had fled, he would trouble himself no more about it. Still, to an enthusiast like the Sergeant, the thing had a great fascination. He positively revelled in the unravelling of the elaborate webs woven by the felonious classes, and although he could not exactly make up his mind that the Doctor belonged to them, and though professionally it would be waste of time to further investigate the matter, still he was curious about the Doctor's former life and antecedents. He read the account of his death in the paper, for it had attracted some little attention, for though eventually determined to be accidental, there had been a suspicion of foul play in the first instance, and this recalled the affair once more to his recollection.

It so happened that duty connected with the apprehension of a gang of swindlers who had been engaged in what is technically known as "the long firm business," carried him over to Paris, and on his way back he resolved to have a palaver with his brethren of the French police at Boulogne with regard to Dr. Lynden's death.

"Ah, it was a strange affair that," said one of their number. "We could make nothing of it. I

don't believe it was an accident any more than I do that he threw himself into the water. There was no more unlikely man to do that than the Doctor—besides he had no reason to do anything of the kind."

"You knew him then?" said Sergeant Evans.

"Ah, no, not personally," rejoined the Frenchman, "but we knew a good deal more about him this side of the water than you did. You would find his *dossier* in the Rue Jerusalem. He was an adventurer and a very sly old fox, quite of *la premiere force*. His colleagues have occasionally been laid by the heels but never himself. Why he left his own country we never knew, but he has been dabbling in financial and political schemes on the Continent all his life."

"Was he ever in the employment of the Russian Government?" asked Evans.

"I can't say. Likely as not. They pay their agents well, that Government, and are clever at choosing them."

"You think he was murdered?" said the Sergeant.

"Ah, who can say?" rejoined the Frenchman. "I can fancy there were some who desired his death. He knew too much."

No further light was ever thrown upon the Doctor's fate or career; with regard to the latter, it was, perhaps, as well that it should remain shrouded in obscurity. While as regards the former, the

Frenchman's remark was perhaps as appropriate an epitaph as any. He knew too much.

Great was the exultation of Tom Byng when he tore open a telegram from Hugh, which contained these words, "Victory all along the line. Dispatches by post. You most honourably mentioned." And when Hugh appeared personally a day or two later, Tom voted it as an occasion of high festival, and was speedily lost in anxious consultation with the cook and wine butler. High and late was the revel that night, but ere it finished Tom was solemnly pledged to act as best man, or, as he more practically put it, had promised to see his chum through. He learnt next morning that Miss Lynden had gone to stay at Twmbarlym until her marriage, and that Hugh intended to follow her there very shortly, having received already most cordial congratulations as well as an invitation from Mrs. Smerdon. "And a very different note," he added, "to the last from Miss Smerdon. Somebody, it seems, had told her that confounded story about the Russian Countess."

Hugh Fleming and his *fiancée* had had more than one talk over this Beatrice and Benedick of the Crimean war. They both agreed that the less they interfered the better; but, as Hugh said, "If they don't get thrown enough together over our wedding to settle their own affairs it must be through sheer perversity."

"She will rather die than give any sign of

affection,'” laughed Nellie in reply, to which Hugh had rejoined :

“ Then it will be for me to drum into Tom’s head that ‘Love must be requited.’ ”

Numberless were the discussions that took place between the two friends about Hugh’s future. Where the marriage was to take place was also a topic of considerable debate. The Smerdons, who insisted on standing in the light of parents to Nellie on this occasion, were anxious that it should take place from Twmbarlym, while Frances, as soon as she had definitely ascertained that Major Byng was to act as Hugh’s backer at the ceremony, obstinately declined to open her lips upon the subject. Hugh, on the contrary, rather inclined to the wedding taking place in Town. He was anxious that some of his brother officers, and other of his old military friends who were now on leave, should be present. Though Twmbarlym was a good house, the putting up of ten or dozen young men would test its resources to the uttermost. Then again, both Peter Phybbs and Polly Tarrant would feel hurt if they were not present at the marriage. It was a point difficult to decide. Although quite aware that it was inimical to his own interests, Tom would not venture to express an opinion in favour of Twmbarlym. He knew, no one better, the advantages of staying in a good country house under like circumstances. If a man couldn’t manage to unravel the tangled skein of his love

under those conditions, his case was indeed hopeless, and with a tinge of regret he found this momentous question eventually settled in favour of St. George's, Hanover Square. In reality, I fancy, whatever they might think, the decision by no means lay with either Hugh or Nellie. Milliners and dressmakers are paramount at such times, and these issued a mandate that they must have the young lady in Town, and that she must remain there, and that if not they could not be answerable for her "things"—a stupendous threat, that no woman would venture to stand out against.

It had been a queer fancy of Hugh's, and Nellie had yielded to his wish, that their wedding should take place on the anniversary of the fall of Sebastopol, the day that had so very nearly proved fatal to him, and on a bright September morning a gay party trooped up the steps of the old church, so famous in past days for fashionable marriages. There was a gallant muster of Hugh's old comrades and other soldier friends, among others Jim Lockwood, who told Hugh that he looked upon this as a very remarkable solemnity, and he only hoped he had been perfectly candid with Mrs. Fleming that was to be. "Because," said the Hussar, "if you fellows marry again in the way you come to life again, it won't be long before she has to bring her action of bigamy." But for all this chaff Mrs. Fleming numbers no handsomer souvenir of her wedding day than the bangle sent by the Dragoon.

Besides the group at the steps of the altar there were a few spectators scattered amongst the pews Mrs. Tarrant was there, with her husband and brother, taking, we may be sure, the greatest possible interest in the whole affair, so much so, indeed, that Polly's eyes wandered in all directions. Nobody in the church was likely to escape her quick eyes. In her heart she thought the church by no means so crowded as it should be for a function of such importance. Suddenly she gave a slight start as she caught sight of two ladies in a prominent place, sitting to her right. Both were richly and fashionably dressed. The one was a dark-eyed, handsome girl, whose face wore a look of contemptuous scorn as she gazed upon the two principals. Her companion was a woman approaching the autumn of life, but still retaining quite sufficient good looks to make one wish one could only have seen her in her meridian. Polly craned forward to get a good view of this pair, and for a minute or so even the scene before the altar ceased to rivet her attention.

"Dick," she whispered, "there she is again, the lady with the roses. Don't you remember the woman you saw coming out of Dr. Lynden's door at Manchester?"

"No, is it; are you sure?"

"Quite certain, Dick."

"Well it don't matter much anyway," replied Mr. Tarrant. "The Doctor's gone, and whatever

his little game was, he can't be run in for it now, that's certain."

"Follow her as soon as she goes out. I want to know where she lives."

"What for?"

"Never mind. Do as I tell you. I want to know who she is," and Mr. Tarrant having growled a responsive "All right," Polly became absorbed again in the marriage service.

"Well, Marie," said the elder lady, as, the affair concluded, friends crowded round the newly-married pair with their congratulations, "I really should like to know what your particular motive for coming here this morning was. Yes, I know you wished to see how these things were done in England, but it was something more than that."

"My dear aunt," replied Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, "Captain Fleming is an old friend of mine."

"Nonsense, child. "I don't believe you ever saw——Yes, now I look in your face, I think you have met before. Where?"

"In the Crimea," rejoined Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, demurely.

"Impossible. I know he was there, and I know you were there, but meet——?"

"Yes, my aunt, we took prisoners at times, you know—I took him."

"Marie, you're incorrigible," said the elder lady as she broke into a peal of laughter.

"He escaped me," said Mademoiselle Ivanhoff,

"and I was curious to see what sort of a woman had captured the renegade. Ah, I wonder who the next will be. He was nice, my Englishman."

Mr. Tarrant, in compliance with his wife's desire, followed the ladies home to a house in Upper Brook Street, and having ascertained the number, turned into the nearest bookseller's and requested leave to look at a Blue Book. A reference to this told him that this was the residence of a Mr. Clifford, with which piece of information he went back to his wife. The name told nothing to Polly, and she was none the wiser for having discovered the identity of the lady of the roses, but happening to come across Sergeant Evans some few months later in Manchester she told him about it. He made no remark, but was probably the only man in England who saw the connection between Dr. Lynden's flight and the abrupt dismissal of Mr. Clifford from a senior clerkship in the Foreign Office.

We are not told that Benedick married Beatrice, but when the curtain falls, as the Scotchman said, "Things look vary suspicious."

THE END.

LISTEN!!

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